

How to Interpret Our Bible

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Rev James Roy. MA



HOW TO INTERPRET OUR BIBLE

An Essay for the Times

BY

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"Catholicity and Methodism," etc.*



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DEDICATION

TO LAYMEN AND WOMEN,

*from whom much important knowledge
is hidden in ponderous and costly vol-
umes;*

TO WORKERS FOR CHURCH UNION,

*who wish to build upon the stable prin-
ciples of the Bible;*

TO REVISERS OF CHURCH FORMU-
LARIES,

*who seek to express only that which is
God's own word, as the basis for healthy
experience and work; and*

TO THE JEWS,

*whose acceptance of Jesus as Messiah
can be possible only as their legitimate
objections to modern theology are re-
moved, and the true sense of Scripture is
established,*

*this little work is respectfully sub-
mitted by*

THE AUTHOR.

ERRATA

Page 35, line 8 from the bottom, for *revelations*, read *relations*.

Page 37, line 4 from the bottom, for *depends*, read *depend*.

Page 60, line 3 from the bottom, for *Jesus*, read *John*.

(*Our Bible.*)

How to Interpret Our Bible

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE BIBLE IS.

Interpretation of Scripture signifies giving the meaning the writers of Scripture intended to convey, and, also, all truth that the Bible reveals about itself or matters contained within it. The need for true methods of interpretation arises on the one hand from the discouragement by authorities of the common use of the Bible, and from the glaring misuse of it on the other.

The proper exercise of private judgment in ascertaining that meaning depends upon the application of wise principles and methods. The most authoritative interpretations must originally have arisen from the private judgment of some people, and must depend for their cogency on the correctness of the principles by which such persons were guided. Without some recognized principles of inter-

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pretation, great mistakes must be made, and people will be carried away by all kinds of follies. We propose to give some rules which experience has proved to be helpful in gaining the true sense of Scripture.

FIRST, REMEMBER WHAT THE BIBLE IS.

I.

It is a collection of writings, not a single book by one author. *It is partly prose and partly poetry.* The revised version prints in a special way the poetic portions, so that they may be recognized at once. In the French translation of Louis Segond, the greater part of the prophecies is printed as poetry. Poetry must not be interpreted as if it were prose, because of the imagination and figures of speech used in it. It would be unwise, for instance, to interpret the passages in Proverbs on Wisdom as if they were prose, like the records in Chronicles.

These writings were composed at various periods of time. The Jews divided the Old Testament into Law, Prophets and Hagiographa, or Kethubhim. The latter are more recent than the former. The New Testament books are still more recent. Hence they pre-

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sent a growth of thought and style, and spring from changing standpoints, which affect their meaning. Christ taught that, when correcting the ancient teaching on divorce.

Single books are often themselves composite. There are different accounts of creation, of the flood, of David and Goliath, and of the biography of the Kings. This, added to the different ages during which the books called Kings and Chronicles were written, makes it impossible so to interpret the narratives of Jehoram and Jehoahaz, for instance, as to form one harmonious and consistent story. Jehoahaz has three names, being known also as Azariah and Ahaziah. He was the youngest son of Jehoram. He began to reign, according to 2 Kings viii., 26, at 22 years of age. His father began to reign when 32, and reigned eight years. The youngest son must have been born when his father was 18 years of age. According to 2 Chron. xxi., 17, 20, and xxii., 2, Jehoram died at 40. His youngest son began to reign at 42. He must have been born two years before his father.

The book of Proverbs is composed of different portions by different authors. Each document speaks its own lesson, and must not be subjected to violence, in order to make it harmonize with another document.

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The books are given in different languages. The Old Testament is, in language, Semitic: the New is Aryan. The Old Testament is mostly in Hebrew, but partly in Aramaic. A Semitic language cannot be interpreted exactly in the same way as an Aryan form of speech. Its structure, history and vocabulary do not admit of many modern forms of thought and expression. In Hebrew, for instance, words are mostly composed, each, of three consonants. Different words are made by joining different vowels to these consonants, by the addition of whole syllables and the doubling of letters. A familiar example is given in the three consonants *d b r*. Put a long *a* after the *d*, and a short *a* after the *b*, and you have a verb meaning "he set in a row." Put a short *i* after *d*, double the *b*, and put *e* after it, and you will have the meaning "he spoke." Now put two long *a*'s after the *d* and *b*, and you have the meanings "a word," "a speech," "a suit at law," "a matter of business," "something," "anything." Now put short *e* after *d* and *b*, and you have "death" and "destruction." Put *o* after *d*, and *e* after *b*, and you will have "pasture." Now put *mi* before *d* and a long *a* after *b*, and you have "a wilderness."

We have nothing like that in our Aryan languages, that came from the north of India;

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and one can see that if he is not sure of his vowels, he can be sure of neither words nor sense. The interpretation, then, of a Semitic language must be guided by different principles from those used for a modern and western language.

The Greek of the New Testament is a more rigidly accurate language than Hebrew. The latter, as one can see, is of necessity poetic, while the former may be more literally rendered. This must be remembered, even when one reads the English translation.

The identity of the authors of the books and parts of books cannot always be ascertained. We know that one writer is recognized by his use of the term "God," and another by the use of "Lord God," in the first chapters of Genesis; but, who either of them was, we cannot tell; and the attempt to decide minutely the authors of separate paragraphs and verses is, in many cases, an impossible task. Yet, to interpret an author correctly, we must often know who he was and when and under what circumstances he wrote. To discover this is the work of what is called Higher Criticism, and the understanding of Scripture depends to a considerable extent upon it.

The Bible is, even in the best manuscripts we possess, affected by circumstances external

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to the Bible itself. In the Old Testament, vowel-points like those used by beginners in the study of phonography, were added only during the early years of the Christian era, to the consonants, to preserve the pronunciation that then prevailed. These vowel-points have been found, in some cases, to be wrongly placed. Of those who inserted them, so great an authority as Gesenius has said: "Their opinion, however, is not binding on us." Yet, it is on the correctness or incorrectness of these vowel-points that we must decide, for instance, whether ravens or Arabs fed Elijah. The English rendering "ravens" depends upon long-existing tradition. We must not forget, however, that the pronunciation of the Hebrew word which gives the sense of "ravens" may, in the distant past, have undergone the slight change which would alter it from that which would give "Arabs."

In the New Testament, also, the oldest manuscripts are in capital letters, with no punctuation marks, or divisions between words, and no accents to decide the meaning of words. The part played by the Greek accents, in more recent copies of the New Testament, is seen in a comparison of Hebrews iii., 16, as given in the Revised Version with King James's version. The former directly contradicts the lat-

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ter. The solution of the question of correctness depends in part upon the kind of an accent used, and its place, on a Greek word. Just as it is in the Old Testament, these marks here tend to perpetuate traditional pronunciations and meanings, which may not always be true. Besides, the meaning of some parts of the New Testament depends upon the spelling of certain words which, in some manuscripts, owed their form, probably, to the following circumstances. One monk probably read from a manuscript, while others copied as he read. His pronunciation was, doubtless, that which we now call modern Greek. In this, many letters and combinations of letters have the same sounds. Hence the copyists might improperly spell the words, and this false spelling would change the sense. What are called "various readings" often show that this was actually the case. Accuracy, therefore, demands a judgment as to which manuscripts probably give the correct spelling and meaning. Instances illustrating this may be found by consulting the various readings in Mark vi., 24, viii., 7, x., 21; Luke iii., 10, xxii., 32; John xvi., 13; Acts viii., 31; James iv., 5; 1 Peter v., 10, in which five such cases occur, and Rev. xv., 4.

This will show how readers of the English only must be dependent upon learned men for

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many things, and how important it is to have a learned pastor.

What we have in English is only a translation, and often a translation from a translation of the original languages. A translator is liable, in his translation, to put, not what the original author meant, but what he thinks, or some one else thinks, the author meant. If he has been taught a certain theological or ecclesiastical system, he is in danger of interpreting the authors of Scriptural books in harmony with his own prepossessions, or with the dictates of authorities to whom he is subject. History tells us that this was really done when, in the so-called authorized version, "bishoprick" was substituted for "office," and "church" for "congregation," to say nothing of the influences brought to bear on Erasmus, to force him to insert in what became the received text that spurious portion of the first epistle of John, verse 7 of chapter 5, which he knew to be no part of Scripture at all.

Sometimes, a translator has been influenced by a popular prejudice. In the Revised Edition of Luke ii., 1, the word "enrolled" properly occurs. The translators of King James's version were influenced, it is said, by the fear of misfortune following the taking of a census, as in the case of David's census of Israel, and

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so they used the word "taxed," which does not give the meaning of the original Greek.

The New Testament writers often quote, not from the original Hebrew, but from the Greek translation called the Septuagint; and Mill, a critic of the 17th century, says that Paul bases arguments on that translation, when, if he had quoted the Hebrew, there would have been no place for any such argument. The Roman Catholics are worse off in this matter than the Protestants; for their Bible was a translation from a translation of a translation of the original, whenever they rendered those portions of the New Testament drawn from the Septuagint first into the Latin of the Vulgate, and then into any modern language. Water poured into a succession of vessels, after it has left the spring and before it has been drunk, is apt to catch the flavor of the wood or brass or iron thru which it has passed.

2.

The Bible is, as a whole, an oriental book. Even that portion of it which is in a western language was written almost entirely by men who thought in eastern fashion.

In style, it is like other oriental literature. One peculiarity may be noticed. It is the

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dramatic style of presenting history. An Egyptian, for instance, in recording the deeds of heroes or deities, did so, not as we western people do, in the third person, but in the first, making the hero or deity **speak** for himself. Every one who reads the record knows that it is not the deity in reality who speaks, but the historian hides himself behind the character whom he portrays. Pahir, for instance, an Egyptian writer, relating the history of Aahmes, writes in this way: "Thus speaks Aahmes, a son of Abana: 'I was presented with a golden chair eight times in the sight of the whole land.'" This style is found in poetry, as well as in prose. An unknown poet wrote a hymn in praise of the god Amon. It begins thus: "Come to me, said Amon, and admire my excellences. I shine in the light of the morning sun thru thy love; and my heart is enraptured, if thou directest thy noble step to my temple." Does not this remind us of the literary style of Proverbs viii., 1, 4: "Doth not wisdom cry: unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men." So, too, does it recall the words: "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, let my people go, that they may serve me."

The same style is shown in the ancient literature of Babylon. The author of the epic

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which treats of Sit-napishti, the Babylonian Noah, instead of saying that his hero did certain things, makes him tell of his own deeds in the first person: "I sent forth a swallow, and let it go; then I sent forth a raven, and let it go." Here we see the very style of Isaiah, in writing his convictions: "Thus saith Jehovah, I am Jehovah, and there is none else: I form the light and create darkness."

We must not forget that the formula, "Thus saith Jehovah," was an idiom common to those whose predictions were proved by experience to be false, and to those whose foresight was correct. Zedekiah, in 1 Kings, xxii., 11, was as emphatic in his use of the formula "Thus saith Jehovah" as was Micaiah in verse 28, and apparently as sincere in his convictions. That the formula was an idiom expressive of convictions whose accuracy was to be tested by results is evident from Deut. xviii., 22; Jer. xxvii., 15, xxviii., 2, 9, xxxii., 8; Ezek. xiii., 6, 7.

The Scripture is eastern in thought also. We western people are scientific, accumulating facts, stating them accurately, and drawing logically our conclusions from them. The oriental is poetical, his very words in prose suggesting figures and imagery. We try to explain things philosophically. Those who examine oriental

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writings may find an undercurrent of what may be called the writer's philosophy; but oriental thought, so far as it is given in the Scriptures, is not what is known as philosophical. The oriental deals in allegory, and ascribes events directly to God or the gods, but not to secondary causes, often to demons, but not to diseases, as we do. Hence we can see the folly of a rule sometimes given for the interpretation of Scripture. It is said that, if a Scriptural expression can be taken literally, it should never be taken figuratively. Such a rule shows, on the part of him who made it, a strange ignorance of the poetic, and therefore figurative, literary genius of the Hebrew people who gave us our Bible.

This peculiarity will explain much, even in New Testament writers, which, when taken as philosophy, leads to great confusion, but which, when seen to be poetical, becomes full of beauty and truth. When John, e.g., speaks of the Logos and Love as being God, and of Love as being Light and Life, he uses not mere Gentile prose, but his own Jewish native poetic thought.

3.

The Scriptures are a religious book. They are redolent of God. They are alive with God.

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They breathe God thru and thru. Old narratives which, in another language and in other literature, were given from the standpoint of heathen polytheism, are, in the Bible, given from the standpoint of a believer in the one God of the Jews. Even in the books that do not name God, the underlying thought of him is present.

He who would interpret any book must first know the kind of book he seeks to explain, and he must have a spirit akin to the book. To understand "Pilgrim's Progress," or "In Memoriam," or "The Innocents Abroad," one must have some experience of temptation, triumph and Christian faith, or have gone down into the realm where facts shake the whole fabric of tradition, or possess such a sense of the ridiculous as will lift him above the tendency to imitate popular ecstasies. So, in coming to the work of interpreting the Bible, he must know the type of book he is dealing with, and must have such knowledge of himself, sin, sorrow, faith and hope in God, Christ and the Holy Spirit that he can say, as he reads: "I know what that means. I have felt it all."

CHAPTER II.

THE BIBLE AND OTHER BOOKS.

Having ascertained what kind of a book the Bible is, apply to it the ordinary rules for the interpretation of other books.

I.

Do not expect to be able, offhand, to explain everything in Scripture. Sometimes the meaning depends upon something which, as yet, we do not know. It was long a puzzle to tell what connection could be between the parts of verse 33 of chapter 30 in Proverbs: "the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood." But, when travelers saw the natives of Palestine, that land of unchanging customs, wringing the skins of milk suspended between branches of a tree, just as angry men wring the noses of those they despise, the meaning at once became clear.

In the same way, it was a knowledge of ancient customs that explained what was meant

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by the giving of a sop to Judas, by the dipping of their hands in the dish, by John's lying on the bosom of Jesus, by the righteous being in the bosom of Abraham, and by Christ's sitting at the right hand of God. Everything was explained by the table-customs of the East. Till we know more of the past, much in Scripture must be inexplicable.

Then, too, there are parts of Scripture that only the future can explain. It was so with the early disciples. Not till after the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension were men able to trace the thread of historical reference running thru the Old Testament, and connecting Jesus with the eternal purpose of God in creation. So, with us: we must wait till events explain themselves, before we can tell the meaning of John's apocalyptic vision, and possibly other prophetic announcements.

It was not till Geology explained the real method by which the world was brought into its present condition that we learned God's use of what we call natural forces. Before that science appeared, men even of the greatest eminence in the Church found no way of explaining the Bible except on suppositions of what must be, when judged from the standpoint of the philosophical assumptions to which they had been accustomed, rather than on ob-

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servation of what actually is. But even we have not yet learned how much may be covered by natural forces. What now seems supernatural may yet prove to be quite natural. Even now, eminent authorities on embryology assert that, under certain given circumstances, a virgin-birth is not an absolute impossibility. Hence, to deny the existence of another and higher realm of life than ours now is, to deny that it can produce effects in our life not conformable to our ordinary experience, and to interpret the Bible from that point of view, may be to miss some of the grandest thoughts granted to men.

2.

Treat Church authorities and documents which profess to give the meaning of the Scriptures with the respect due to their learning and honesty, but remember that more mature scholarship than theirs may warrant the rejection of their judgment.

This is of the highest importance; for that which took place in Roman law has happened, also, in the Christian Church: official interpretations of law came eventually themselves to have the force of law. The edicts of the Praetor Urbanus, which gave his interpretation of

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the law, were studied in the early life-time of Cicero as sources of law along with the Twelve Tables. In process of time, the submission to such authority, without regard to the reasons on which its decisions were based, degenerated into a mere mechanical submission to majorities of interpreters, and marked the decay of law in the Western Empire.

So the decisions of bishops in Council assembled, apart from consideration of the reasons on which those decisions were based, came to be regarded as law to the Church. Conciliar decisions came to be regarded as equal in authority with Scripture, and then practically superior to it; and that phase of human folly has not yet passed away. What happened when bishops were supreme was practised by church authorities who no longer recognized episcopal government as having any inherent right of rule. But the prevalence of this spirit marked the beginning of the "falling away" predicted by Paul, as about to take place before the second coming of Christ.

Even the highest courts of the Church have made mistakes, and may do it again. The general consent of Christian people of any particular period is of little value when that period is found to have lacked information gained by a subsequent period. It is wise for single in-

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dividuals of limited knowledge to accept the judgment of those more learned than themselves; but, at no period is it safe to take even the Church's judgment as infallible. The mind must be kept open for information, for lack of which even early centuries often were mistaken.

3.

Do not confound adaptation with interpretation. Scriptural expressions often seem peculiarly fitted to modern circumstances. To assume that this fitness was what was originally intended would lead to great mistakes. For instance, in Dan. vii., 18, it is said that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." It is possible for the Mormons, accustomed to call themselves the "Latter Day Saints," to adapt that passage to themselves; but such an unwarrantable use of Scripture is no proof that Daniel, or God speaking thru Daniel, had any allusion to their unwarrantable, idolatrous, adulterous and mischievous system. In 1 Corinthians xv., 28, we find these words: "that God may be all in all." This can be adapted to the fundamental theory of what is called "Christian Science," but it

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would be folly to suppose that Paul used the expression to support that pantheistic and fantastic system. This interpretation, or adaptation, by Mrs. Eddy has been fostered by the practice of putting the emphasis on "all in all," instead of where the author's contrasted objects demand that we should place it, viz., on "God" as contrasted with "Son." The contrast is not between an incomplete aspect of God and a complete one, but between the being who is exalted and him who is subjected.

In 1 Timothy iv., 14, we read: "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." This has been adapted to a modern form of Church government, which has a court called "the presbytery," to prove that such a court existed in Paul's day, and that the modern form was the primitive form. In Acts vi., 6, and 2 Tim. i., 6, however, we find that, in New Testament times, "presbytery" meant the older men, and that in the case of ordination, the act was performed by the apostles, Paul himself being one of them.

4.

Remember that, even amongst the writers of Scripture, there was a progress of opinion. In the earlier books, God is represented as seen.

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In later books, he is called one "whom no man hath seen or can see." In early books, the law was said to have been given directly by the finger of God. In later times, this was attributed to the ministry of angels. In early books, sacrifices were rigidly enjoined. In later times, even a prophet questioned the divine authority of such injunctions. In early books, divorce was made easy. In later times, Christ rebuked the low morals of "them of old time" that led to such divorces. At one time, the observance of the Sabbath was based upon a certain aspect of the creation of the world. At a later period, in Deuteronomy, it was based on the results of deliverance from Egypt. Still later, our Lord based it upon the needs of mankind. In early times, polygamy was allowed. In books of more recent date, monogamy is enjoined. In Genesis vi., 5, humanity is spoken of as utterly depraved. By Acts x., 28, no man is to be considered common or unclean. In the first chapter of Genesis, the Hebrew word for God is the plural polytheistic term "gods." In the second chapter, there is attached to it a singular name, Yahweh, or, as it is commonly written, with the vowel-points of another word added to it, Jehovah, which modifies the polytheistic signification. In the fourth chapter, the beginning of the use of this singular term is

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referred to the time of Enosh. Yet, in Exodus vi., 3, it is said that this singular term was not known to the patriarchs as God's name; but Moses made it the national Jewish name for the Deity, so that, in Psalm lxxxiii., 18, God is said to have a monopoly of it. There was evidently a development or evolution in the use of "the incommunicable name."

It would be folly, therefore, to interpret the Scriptures of the early period in favor of what, in after times, had been repudiated, even by the authority of the Christ himself. The revelation of God has been gradual, and its perfection is to be sought, not in the earliest times, but in Jesus Christ, the climax of the ages. The spirit was promised to lead us into all truth. The leading has never ceased.

5.

Remember that, in Scripture, as in other ancient and oriental literature, language used by one author is often attributed to another. This was not, in ancient times, regarded as dishonest. It takes place in the Bible in two ways. First, it occurs in the titles of books. Many Psalms were not written by David, yet the collection is attributed to him by those who quote them. Many proverbs were written by other

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authors than Solomon, but the book is called by his name. Possibly this is true of the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel, as well as of other books of the Old Testament, as they have come down to us. Some would assert the same of the New.

Secondly, in the introduction of single expressions, the same is true. For instance, the writer of Genesis ii., 24, has put into the mouth of Adam the words: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Yet, if Adam was the first man, and no child had yet been born, what could he know of fathers and mothers, and the treatment yet to be given to them by their offspring? But that word "therefore" shows that the statement is a conclusion drawn from verse 23: "she shall be called Woman (in Hebrew *Ishah*) because she was taken out of man" (Hebrew *Ish*). Such a derivation of one word from another implies a knowledge of philology altogether inconsistent with the circumstances of Adam at that time, and also implies that Hebrew, which bears traces of being a derived language, was the first speech known upon earth. The expressions are really those of the historian, not of the first man.

The same is, perhaps, true of the expressions put, in his own dramatic way, into the lips of

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Balaam's ass, by the narrator of Balaam's cupidity and the animal's perversity.

Possibly the same thing may explain the last clause of John iii., 13: "the Son of Man who is in heaven," if the last four words should be accepted at all. They do not occur in the oldest manuscript which we possess, that of Tichen-dorf. But, in any case, they sound as if used by a narrator after Christ's ascension, rather than by Christ himself.

6.

Do not fail to become familiar with rabbinic methods which have left their impress upon Scripture.

The rabbis used sometimes to interpret Scripture by a certain kind of analogy. Each Hebrew letter represents a certain number. If the sum of the numbers represented by the consonants of one word equalled the sum of those in another word, the second word was considered equivalent to the first. It has perplexed Christian people to know how the word "Shiloh," the name of a place, Gen. xlix., 10, came to be used in theology for the name of Messiah.

The original writer never so used it; but certain rabbis found that the letters of Shiloh and Messiah represented the number 358, and,

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because the words were in this way analogous, they made Shiloh mean Messiah. They did this by a method called *Gematria*, a word akin to *Geometry*. Christian theologians accepted the conclusion, regardless of the method by which it was reached, and so substituted for Scriptural truth a worthless tradition.

Some rabbis adopted another method of interpretation, and, perhaps, writers themselves adopted it in cases where prudence suggested the substitution of one word for another. They numbered the letters of one word in their order in the alphabet. Then they began at the end of the alphabet, and worked backward toward the beginning. If, in doing so, they found that a word was made by taking the same numbers in order, but counting the last letter of the alphabet as the first, they substituted the second word for the first. Now, take the word *Leb-kamai*, in the Revised Version of Jeremiah li., 1, and examine it as treated in that way; and, from giving no sense at all, it then gives the word *Kasdim*, which means Chaldeans; and Chaldea makes the sense quite clear.

So, too, the word *Sheshach*, in Jeremiah li., 41, when treated in the same way, shows Babel to have been the original word hidden under the form *Sheshach*.

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It was customary, in the education of rabbis, to prescribe a thesis contrary to the law, to be supported by the Scriptures. This was done, no doubt, to show familiarity with Scripture. It was accomplished by arguments based on passages taken away from their context, and used to support the desired conclusion. Some passages in the New Testament show the influence of this method of reasoning. Allegories, e.g., show this.

7.

Do not confound the theological meaning of words with the Scriptural meaning of them. An illiterate man in the backwoods once professed to the writer to have made a great discovery. He had found, so he said, who God's father was, and where he had come from; and to prove this he quoted Habakkuk iii., 3: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran." Teman, a place in the South, connected with the early manifestations of God to the Israelites, he took for the name of a person whom he supposed to be God's father. What was the mistake of this man's interpretation? He had taken a word used in Scripture, had put upon it a meaning the author did

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not attach to it, and then put forward his own notion as the teaching of the Scriptures. Is this a fault of the illiterate only? The ordinary layman would be astonished to know how often the same thing has been done in the name of theology, and how that theology has been embodied in confessions, articles, creeds, liturgies and hymns, until few persons can perceive that the theology and the Scriptures do not teach the same things.

To give proof of this, it will, therefore, be important to quote a somewhat long passage from Professor Robertson Smith, who suffered for his honest efforts to enlighten the laity on this most important subject. The following extract is taken from his first lecture on "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church."

"Observe that the exhaustive and all-sided knowledge of the meaning of the Bible which we are now contemplating is something quite distinct from a complete knowledge of the system of theological doctrine. Systematic theology * * * * may be called the abstract theory of the truths of religion. It tries to refer the facts and experiences of the religious life, and the whole method of revelation and redemption, to general principles, and to explain all details under these principles in a philosophical and logical sequence.

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In doing this systematic theology goes beyond the Bible, altho it builds upon it. The abstract terms which it uses, the philosophical notions which it develops, are often not Biblical. For example, you will not find in the Bible any exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, any definition of person and substance and essence, and all the other terms of which the chapter about the Trinity in every theological system is full. Nor will you find any discussion as to the theory of the person of Christ, or of any of those definitions as to the two natures, the two wills, *communicatio idiomatum*, and all the other points which arise when we attempt to give a theory of the Person of our Lord. In place of such abstract and theoretical discussion, the Bible sets before us the living Christ in experimental manifestation, as He actually lived and taught, suffered and rose again; it sets before us the Father, Son and Spirit as revealed in the actual work of redemption, and in that multiplicity of revelations to man which forms the experimental basis of all dogmatic speculation on the Divine Being."

To understand "dogmatic speculation" is one thing. To reach the true sense of Scripture is quite another thing. To gain the author's meaning is not always an easy task. Sometimes it will be necessary to take a good

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Concordance, and find out all the places where a given word occurs, to read it in connection with what accompanies it, and thus to find what meanings are given to it, and what sense it bears in the passage referred to. This will give hard work; but such a way of reading and interpreting the Bible will make more intelligent people, and will give an assurance of certainty to their judgment that is worth all that it will cost.

For instance, it will entail some trouble to go over in this way the 120 passages in the New Testament where the term "Son of God" occurs. But, when you have found that the term is used of Jesus Christ twice from his miraculous birth, nine times distinctly, and 109 times, probably, in the sense of Messiah, and never once with any other meaning, you rise from your work with a confidence that you know the meaning of the Scriptures for yourself, whatever any theologian, ancient or modern, or any writer of hymns, may honestly try to impose upon you. You will, also, be in a position to sympathize with those who strive to secure a revision of our theologies and formularies of doctrine and worship, to bring them into harmony with the Scriptures, the translations of which have, themselves, been revised, so as to secure accuracy of truth. It will not be the

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smallest of the benefits of such a course that you, at least, will not be involved in the guilt of substituting for Christianity the speculations, theories and definitions of theologians which arouse antagonism in the minds of those who know the facts better than the theologians themselves.

This term, just alluded to, "The Son of God," in its history, gives, perhaps, the most telling instance of how theology has often obscured the true sense of the Bible.

Living things grow, whether animals or vegetables. Growth may be healthy or unhealthy. Food, air, exercise, chemical forces at work in the constitution, decide whether some parts of the body develop to the disadvantage of others, and whether disease may or may not lurk in the system.

Is it possible that doctrines grow, also? The answer to this question is found in the definition of the term "doctrines." They are the formally expressed opinions of men. The healthy or unhealthy conditions of the growth of these opinions, whether in the form which they assume or the prevalence to which they attain, depend upon the facts on which they are based, the correctness of men's reasoning from these facts, and the power of authority to impress that reasoning on the mass of thinkers.

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Science has its doctrines, and they grow and change in accordance with the laws of development. In Reid's "Elements of Chemistry," published by Chambers, and reprinted in 1849 by Barnes and Co., of New York, heat is described as "a peculiar fluid" termed "caloric," with "no appreciable weight," but with universal penetrating power. In Stewart's "Conservation of Energy," issued by the Appletons in 1874, heat is said to be a "motion of the molecules of bodies."

The earlier doctrine was that heat was a substance. The later doctrine teaches that it is a mode of motion. The scientific doctrine grew from one form to another in not more than 25 years.

It is a mistake to suppose that theological doctrine is fixed, rigid as cast-iron, and too sacred ever to be reviewed, modified and more correctly stated. On the contrary, the history of doctrines enables us to see the core of truth around which they have shaped themselves, and to judge whether the growth of them has been healthy or not, thus warning us ever to return to the original truth, and to beware of the corruptions which so easily creep in.

It may be found interesting and profitable to trace the history of the theological doctrine

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of the Son of God, in comparison with the teaching of the Scriptures.

1. Let us examine the Scriptural presentation of it. The term "Son of God," as has been stated, occurs in the New Testament in King James's version 120 times. Twice in Luke i., 32, 35, it is used of Jesus from his miraculous birth. "Thou shalt bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High." "The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; therefore also the holy thing that is begotten shall be called the Son of God."

Nine times, the expression is used as synonymous with the term Christ, or Messiah, the anointed one: Matth. xvi., 16, xxvi., 63; Mark xiv., 60; Luke iv., 41; John i., 49, vi., 69, xi., 27, xx., 31; Acts ix., 20.

One hundred and nine times in King James's version, and 107 times in the Revised Version, the term is used apparently as equivalent to Messiah. In not one unambiguous instance has the term "Son of God" any other sense than these in the New Testament. Hagenbach, in his History of Doctrines, justly says therefore: "the term Son is used in the New Testament in direct reference to the human personality of Christ." He says also: "the expres-

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sion Son of God, in the New Testament, is undeniably used of the historical Christ."

2. Next, let us examine the presentation of it, as briefly as may be, in the writings of the early Fathers. The term "Fathers" is applied to certain early writers who were regarded as authorities on matters of doctrine.

They are divided into Apostolic Fathers, who number, according to some, five, and according to others, seven, and Church Fathers. They mark the transition of Christianity from Jewish to Gentile thought; and they were, with very few exceptions, men whose early education and ways of thinking had been moulded under heathen philosophy. As a rule, they knew nothing of the language, idioms, and oriental modes of thought prevalent amongst the Jews who were the first Christians. To this, and to the fact that the Scriptures known to them were in the Greek language, may be attributed their tendency to take as literal prose what to a Jew would be figurative and poetical. Of physical science, on the structure of the world and its growth, with its revelation of God's real method of creating it, as well as on the laws of the development of human life in its first stages, they were almost absolutely ignorant. Their reasoning was based, not on the careful observation of facts or the critical

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examination of documents, but on speculative theories assumed as truths. Often, what they regarded as facts, we now see to be only fancies, analogies and illustrations.

They nobly defended Christianity, from their standpoint, against its numerous foes. But they were, in race, language, training and modes of thought, occidentals, not orientals as were the founders of Christianity.

We need not be surprised, then, if we find a marked change from apostolic thought and statement in their way of teaching about the Son of God. In searching the writings of the earliest of these so-called "Fathers," we meet with many expressions that simply echo the sayings of the writers of the New Testament. For instance, Polycarp, who lived from 65 to 155 A. D., says: "Jesus Christ himself who is the Son of God." Much in Clement of Rome, from 30 to 100 A. D., is of the same tenor. But the first century has scarcely closed before a new line of thought begins to be followed.

(1) *The first step in the change from Jewish and Scriptural thought on this subject is found in the identification of the Son of God with the Logos of St. John.* We read in the English of the fourth gospel: "In the beginning was the Word." The Greek, properly

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rendered, is: "In the beginning was the Logos." The word "Logos" is a philosophical term, with which John, no doubt, became familiar in Ephesus. It has three meanings, Reason, or the thinking faculty; Thought, or the product of that faculty; and Word, or the outward expression of that product. Tho a philosophical term, used by Plato and Philo, its threefold sense makes it capable of a fine poetic usage.

Some of the Fathers recognize this threefold meaning of the term. Thus Hippolytus, in the third century, wrote: "This solitary and supreme Deity, by an exercise of reflection brought forth the Logos first, not the Word in the sense of being articulated by voice, but as a ratiocination of the universe, conceived and residing in the divine mind." Tertullian, also, about the same time wrote as follows: "God is rational, and Reason was first in him, and so all things were from himself. This Reason is his own Thought, which the Greeks call Logos, by which we also designate Word or Discourse; and therefore it is now usual with our people, owing to the more simple interpretation of the term, to say, that the Word was in the beginning with God; altho it would be more suitable to regard Reason as the more ancient, because God had not the Word from the begin-


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ning, but he had Reason even before the beginning."

Here, the Logos is described as the Thought of God, the ideal product of his eternal and spiritual Reason, unexpressed as yet by any outward Word.

Searching still further, we find this Logos represented as a self-conscious individual Being, one with whom the Father converses, plans, and constructs the world. In the Epistle of Barnabas, for instance, which is part of the Sinaitic manuscript of the New Testament, God is represented as saying to such a Being: "Let us make man." In another place, Barnabas takes the words of Isaiah, which really refer to Cyrus, and applies them to that Being, as one to whom the nations should yield obedience.

The "Pastor" of Hermas, also part of the Sinaitic manuscript, speaks in the same way of this Being, as the councillor of God, along with the angels. Justin Martyr, too, writing of this Logos, identifies it with a Being who proclaims himself to Joshua as a Captain, and appears in a human form. Justin calls this Being "a certain rational power, this God begotten of the Father, who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being."

 *How did this transition from regarding*

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the Logos as a divine thought or ideal to regarding it as an intelligent, self-determining Being take place? Firstly, by personification and the turning of poetry into metaphysical prose. In the Book of Proverbs, poetical imagery represents Wisdom as eternal and the guiding principle in the creation of the world. It is poetry that speaks in Proverbs viii., 22, 23, 25, 27, 30. But Ignatius, between 30 and 107 A. D., applies it all to the Logos. Wisdom poetically says, for instance: "The Lord created me, the beginning of his ways, for his ways, for his works. Before the world did he found me, and before all the hills did he beget me." This passage, here given as Ignatius rendered it, he applies to the Logos, in the first chapter of John, "In the beginning was the Word," or Logos, thus identifying a mental quality and a Being, making prose out of poetry, just as other Gentiles had done in taking poetic descriptions of natural forces, and had turned them into prosaic biographies of imaginary living individuals.

Secondly, the transition arose from a play upon a word. Irenaeus, between 120 and 202 A. D., quoted John as to the creation of all things, by the Word, and applied to that Word the assertion about the spoken word in Genesis and the Psalms: "He spake and they were

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made." In the one case, he used the term "word" of a command, a *fiat*. In the next, he used it as of a living Being, and asserted of it in the latter sense what is true of it in the former sense. Thus the Logos became regarded as an intelligent, self-determining Being, who could give and take counsel, and choose and perform his own line of action. If anything appears to be lacking in the presentation of this fact, it is supplied by the language of Origen, who dates from 185 to 230 or 254 A. D. He says: "Let no one imagine or suppose that we understand him to be not a living Being. That language which is found in the *Acts of Paul*, where it is said here is the word a living Being (*Hic est verbum animal vivens*), appears to me to be rightly used."

To the Logos, as an individual Being, was attached the name Son, and the terms became synonymous. The process of reasoning by which this was brought about is suggested by Tertullian, who says: "every original source is a parent, and everything which issues from the origin is an offspring." Hence the conclusion drawn from the fact that the Logos was produced by the Father seemed to warrant the application to it of the name Son. That use which, as a figure, might be justified was identified with the actual Scriptural use of the term.

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What, in one sense *may be* is identified with what, in another sense, *is*; and what is true of the one is asserted of the other.

Jesus Christ was identified with the Logos and with Wisdom regarded as an individual Being, and all that could be claimed for the Logos was asserted of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus, Justin Martyr, in his First Apology, uses this language: "Jesus Christ is the only proper Son who has been begotten by God, being his Word," or Logos. "And the first power after God the Father and Lord of all is the Word, who is also the Son."

Ignatius, also, writing to the Tarsians, quotes Proverbs on Wisdom and applies the quotation to "God the Word, and the only-begotten Son." To the Philippians he quotes Proverbs ix., 1: "Wisdom builded for herself a house," and applies this to the birth of "God the Word."

Origen, in his work on *Principles*, quotes 1 Cor. i., 24: "Christ is the power of God and the Wisdom of God," as if it meant Wisdom, as described in Proverbs, and as the Word, or Logos, in the capacity of a living Being, who is also the Son of God. He argues that Wisdom and the Word being eternal, Jesus, as Wisdom, the Word and the Son of God, must be eternal. Forgetting, apparently, that God

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can be called Father because he is the origin, producer and protector of all things, he argues that he cannot be called an eternal Father unless he has an eternal Son. He says: "what-ever, therefore, we have predicted of the wisdom of God will be appropriately applied and understood of the Son of God."

This is simply an application to Christ of Aristotle's argument for the eternity of matter. If I understand that argument, it is this: The formless basis of what becomes possessed of form, thru the process of endless time *may be* called matter. The world, which is the sum of all forms which have become existent, *is* matter. But the basis acted upon thru endless time is eternal. Therefore the world is eternal. The two arguments seem to be parallel and equally fallacious.

(2) *The next step in the growth of this doctrine is that Jesus became regarded, not as a man, but only as the human nature assumed by the eternal Logos.*

After what was taken to be true of the Logos had been asserted of Jesus, as the undoubted Son of God, a new question arose. If this Logos, called the Word, was a self-conscious Being, existing from eternity, was the man Jesus also a self-conscious Being, or was He not? Then, were there two such Beings com-

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bined in one, and both entitled to the name Son of God, one born in time, and one existent from eternity?

An escape from the dilemma appeared to some to lie in the view that Jesus was not a human person or Being, but only the human nature assumed by the eternally existent Logos, who alone was entitled to be considered the person of Jesus Christ. What human nature was, apart from a concrete man, these theologians did not determine. Nor did they, in their ignorance of the laws of embryology, venture to explain how a self-conscious Being, the world's Creator, could transform Himself, as their theory demanded, into the tiny mass of protoplasm which, as an egg, must pass from an ovary of the Virgin Mary through a Fallopian tube into the womb, before it could develop into a form with a human constitution or nature. This development, during the time of gestation, would, as in all such cases, proceed thru changes similar to the development of all animal life. Dr. Le Conte says: "The individual higher animal in embryonic development, passes thru temporary stages which are similar, in many respects, to permanent or mature conditions in some of the lower forms in the same group."

For instance, to give the facts as briefly as

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may be, there is a period when the embryo has gills, showing the stage when it bears the traces of a fish ancestry. The brain shows traces of an ancestry lower than fishes, and passes thru the fish stage, the reptile stage, the bird stage and the ordinary mammalian stage; and only after that does it reach the human stage. Thus the child, prior to birth, bears traces of an ancestry leading back to the lowest forms of animal life. No child is born of a woman without passing thru this process. Jesus was born after the usual period of gestation. It must, therefore, be assumed that this process of development occurred in his case.

The theory that Jesus was not a man, but only the human nature or constitution assumed by the preëxistent Being called the Logos and Wisdom, implies that that Being transformed himself into a mass of jelly-like protoplasm not larger than a pin's head, and passed thru changes indicating an ancestry that never was his. Yet, that such a transformation took place was assumed as the truth. It has been embodied in our doctrinal and devotional formularies, and in our hymns.

A Jewish writer has lately objected to this theory as overthrowing the teaching of the prophets which Jesus himself came to fulfil. It adds an element to the Apostles' Creed which

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is not found in that common creed of Christendom. This creed simply asserts the birth of Jesus from a virgin, a thing which at least two eminent writers on embryology, Balfour and Kirke, assure us is not absolutely impossible, but would, under certain given circumstances, occur normally. The theory in question adds to this the notion that what was so born was the transformed Being who had made the world.

So great a defender of evangelical truth and religion as Dr. Dorner asserts that this theory of the person of Christ must be abandoned. But, notwithstanding all objection, it is upheld by that great theologian, Hooker, and remains to-day the popular conception of the Son of God.

It is not often that the laity are informed of the processes of growth in popular doctrines, because the works exhibiting them are costly and ponderous. This very meagre sketch is designed to help as many of the laity as it may reach to understand something of that growth. It will suggest several questions.

Was the authority by which this last phase of the doctrine of the Son of God was enforced competent to decide it, and warranted in enforcing it? Was the reasoning by which this phase was reached conducted according to

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those laws which mark all correct reasoning? Were the premises of this reasoning correctly understood and stated, and did they warrant the conclusion drawn from them? Was the interpretation of the Scriptures, supposed to warrant it, carefully and critically examined before it was propounded? Would it not be sufficient to abide by the simple Scriptural statement of the doctrine, without those additions to it made by the speculations of the Gentiles into whose hands Christianity was thrust by unbelieving Jews?

Another case in which one must be on his guard against confounding theological with Scriptural language is in the use of technical terms. What is called "Systematic Theology" often uses Scriptural words as technical terms of a science. In time, the technical sense becomes accepted as if it were the meaning of Scripture. An illustration of this is found in the technical use of the word *proceed*. Christ said the Comforter *proceeds* from the Father. Tertullian applies that word to the generation of Jesus Christ. In a note on Tertullian's remark, Bishop Coxe says: "the Nicene Creed made it *technically* applicable to the Spirit, making the distinction marked between the *generation* of the Word, and the *procession* of the Holy Ghost."

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The Bible knows nothing of this "technical" use and distinction of words. There is no reason to think that Jesus Christ had in mind any distinction between technical terms, when he used the expression given in John xv., 26. He, doubtless, used it just as it is used in Matth. iv., 4: "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." That which is Providentially brought about proceeds, or comes down, from God. If we wish to ascertain the true meaning of Scripture, we must never confound theological with Scriptural uses.

8.

Explain difficult passages in harmony with those that are simple and clear. This rule may not enable us to understand what the author of a difficult passage actually meant by it; but it will save us from attributing to him a meaning which would contradict something of which the sense is perfectly clear. In the gospel of John, for instance, there are passages the meaning of which cannot admit of any uncertainty, while others are capable of more than one meaning. It would save men from much confusion and contradiction if the simple meaning of the one class were always made to de-

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cide between the possible ambiguities of the other. The same is true of Scripture generally. As concrete cases give clearer proof than mere abstract statements, some simple passages will now be given, to be followed by some that are ambiguous, that the bearing of the rule may become apparent.

"I am Jehovah, and there is none else: beside me there is no God," Isaiah xlv., 5. "Jesus answered: The first is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," Mark xii, 29. "No man hath seen God at any time," John i., 18. "The glory that cometh from the only God," John v., 44. "Him the Father, even God, hath sealed," John vi., 27. "The Father is greater than I," John xiv., 28. "They should know thee, the only true God and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ," John xvii., 3. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God," John xx., 17. "This Jesus did God raise up," Acts ii., 32. "There is no God but one," I Cor. viii., 4. "To us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, thru whom are all things, and we thru him," I Cor. viii., 6. "God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ," II Cor. i., 2. "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus," II Cor. xi., 31. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

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and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all," II Cor. xiii., 14. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," Ephes. i, 17. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," Ephes. iv., 5, 6. "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our God and the Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Thess. i., 1, 2, 12. "There is one God, one mediator, also, between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus," I Tim. ii., 5. "As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness," Ezekiel xxxiii., 12.

A review of these passages here selected shows that their statements are so simple and clear that there can be no ambiguity about them. They teach that God is the Father of all, that the Father is the whole and only Deity, and that the terms God and Jesus Christ are mutually exclusive; and they do this on the authority of Jesus Christ himself, Mark, John, Peter and Paul. In this they agree with Isaiah, "the Evangelical prophet." The Collect for the 18th Sunday after Trinity in the Prayer Book of the Anglican Church, which says: "to follow thee, the only God, thru Jesus Christ our Lord," agrees with them. They answer exactly to the historical faith of the Jews in the

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unity of the Deity, and in the certainty of forgiveness to him who turns from evil to God. Being so perfectly clear of all ambiguity, they should decide the sense in which every ambiguous passage on the same topics should be taken. They should do this, even if no other means of testing the real sense of ambiguous passages should be found. But a careful examination of such passages will show that, in some cases, the ambiguity arises from an incorrect reading, and that others can easily be seen to harmonize with these simple statements.

How the application of this principle of testing the obscure by the simple and clear unfolds the meaning of Scripture may best be seen by applying it to actual cases of ambiguity.

Let us begin, then, with Isaiah ix., 6: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This passage admits of more than one rendering. It depends upon the punctuation of the Hebrew sentence whether the person spoken of is both wonderful in himself and also a counsellor, or whether he is to be taken as a wonderful counsellor. The use of conjunctive or disjunctive points will determine the question; and it must be remembered

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that these points were not used before the sixth Christian century. It depends upon the meaning of the Hebrew word *El*, whether the term Mighty God or Mighty Hero should be used in translation. The word in question originally meant one in whom heroic excellence dwelt; and, as God was regarded as the centre of all excellence, it was subsequently applied to him. In the former sense of a hero it is used in Ezekiel xxxi., 11 and elsewhere. It may mean, as Gesenius takes it, the mighty hero, or the Messiah, as well as the Mighty God.

The term "Everlasting Father" seems to have a strange application to one who, in theology, is constantly spoken of by most Christians as the "Everlasting Son." Yet the term may equally well be rendered "The father of an age of endless progress." The elevation of this predicted person to such high dignity is said, in verse seven, to be due to the act of Jehovah, who proclaims himself to be the only God. Taking the clear and simple passages as deciding between the ambiguities of meaning in the verse, there is in it no prediction of any rival to the name and prerogatives of the only Deity. If fault is to be found, it must be with the translation.

Another ambiguous passage is John i., 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

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was with God, and the Word was God." The term translated "Word" is Logos. This term has three meanings, which renders the passage peculiarly ambiguous. The three meanings are—The thinking faculty, or Reason, the ideal product of that faculty, or a Thought, and the outward expression of that product, or a Word. It will be quite apparent that the choice, in translation, of a term whose very meaning indicates that it must designate a later time than another, and yet to predicate that it was "in the beginning" must render the passage not only ambiguous but confusing. A word is always later in origin than the thought which it expresses. The thought is in the beginning. The word comes afterward. Then, to add to this, as theologians have done, the notion that this "Word" was an eternal, self-determining and divine Being, yet not the original Being whose thought it expressed must necessarily clash with the fundamental idea of a single Deity.

The other sense of which this verse is capable is that, prior to all outward expression, there was a Thought, or ideal, to be expressed, and that this eternal ideal, Deity itself, was what occasioned the bringing of the world into being, guided its development, and, finally, became embodied in a human being, who became, thru the anointing of the divine Spirit,

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which is the dynamic power of the Most High, the express image, the Word, of God.

This part of the preamble of the fourth gospel is thus capable of two meanings. Which of the two is correct can easily be determined by applying to them the test of the simple, clear passages before cited.

In John i., 14 occurs the expression, "the only-begotten of the Father," while the margin renders the same passage thus: "an only-begotten of a father." The first rendering lends itself to the theological notion of a Being eternally begotten, whatever that may mean. The second draws a comparison between one being and another. The first launches us into a discussion, the end of which is the assertion of two divine Beings, who are yet asserted to be but one. The second asserts the preciousness of Jesus in the sight of the one God who, from the beginning, had recognized him as the coming key-stone of the arch of human deliverance from sin, sorrow and death. Which meaning accords best with the clear and simple passages will be easily understood.

In John i., 15 we have "He that cometh after me is become before me; for he was before me." To the ordinary reader of the English versions, this seems unambiguous, and appears to teach Christ's pre-existence; but, in the

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Greek, the words rendered "before" are different from each other, the first referring to place or position, and the second to either time or value. The passage thus becomes ambiguous. If we take the second case of "before" in the sense of time, we are again launched into the discussion of pre-existence and dual deity. If we take it in the sense of value or importance, it gives us the thought: "He is put before me, because he was more important than I." Testing this by the clear passages, it is easy to decide which meaning is correct.

John vi., 51 reads: "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven." Are we to take this as literally teaching the descent from heaven of a pre-existent being, whose flesh must, literally, as the Jews thought he meant, and as Romanizing sacramentarians now think, be eaten in order to life eternal? Or may it be taken in the sense of James i., 17, as figuratively spoken of all the good things which come thru God's providence? In this connection, must we take John vi., 62 as teaching that this bread was literally in heaven before it appeared on earth, or may we take it in the sense of Peter i., 20, who represents it as existing in the foreknowledge of God, but manifested only in our times? Again the simple passages decide for us which sense is true. The same

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principle will apply to John x., 30, xvi., 28, and xvii., 5.

In John viii., 24, 28, 58, as in iv., 26, xiii., 19, we have Jesus Christ making use of the expression, "I am." Are we from this to argue that he existed, not in the purpose of God, but in divine personality from all eternity? Or may we take the expression, without any formal completion of the predicate, and leaving that to be supplied by the demands of the occasion, as an idiom, peculiar to the Jews? In Mark xiii., 6, and Luke xxi., 8, it is used, in the Greek, without any "he" following it, as in English, by the pretended Christs whose deeds Jesus foretold. It seems, therefore, to be idiomatic, with no peculiar theological significance. The simple and clear passages will again help us to decide between the two possible meanings of the expression.

In John xx., 28, Thomas, at the sight of the wounded hands and side of Jesus, cries: "My Lord and my God!" Is it certain that this meant, in the mind of Thomas, that Jesus was at once both Lord and God? Or may he not have felt that, in raising up a Savior, God was present, also? In Luke i., 76, ~~Zacharias~~ ^{Zecharias} says of the babe, ~~Jesus~~: "thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High." The child is not the Most High; yet, in v. 68, thanks are

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given to the God of Israel inasmuch as, by the coming of this child, God "hath visited and wrought redemption for his people." Again, in Luke vii., 16, on the raising up of the son of the widow of Nain, the multitude call Jesus "a great prophet," and say that, in his coming, "God hath visited his people."

Here, then, are two distinct meanings possible in the exclamation of Thomas. Which must be chosen may easily be determined by the conformity of either of them to the passages which contain no ambiguity.

Continuing our examination of the writings of John, let us turn to his first epistle, the third chapter and the 16th verse. One meaning is put upon the passage by the version of King James, to this effect: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us," as if God died. The Revised Version puts it thus: "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us;" and so it leaves it to be understood who loved us unto death, yet it does not identify him with God.

Not only do the simple passages decide in favor of the latter, but the very italics in the so-called "authorized version" show that, in the original, the words "of God" have no place. Here, again, theology has stepped in and de-

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faced the truth, that its tradition might be upheld.

In Acts xx., 28, we have another ambiguous passage, where the version of King James reads: "feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood," while the American Revision reads: "feed the church of the Lord, which, etc." Here the ambiguity is very perplexing, since the two oldest MSS. read "God," while some MSS. give "Lord and God," and others "God and Lord," "Lord God" and "Christ," and the word "Lord" is preferred by Lachman, Tischendorf, T. S. Green, Tregelles, the MSS. known as A, C, D, E, etc., and the Coptic, Sahidic, Armenian and other versions.

Amid such variety of opinion, what can give a satisfactory decision except the plain, clear testimony of the simple passages before noticed? Their decision will certainly be for "Lord," and not "God."

In Romans ix., 5, we have, as possible meanings of the passage: "Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever," "He who is God over all be (or is) blessed for ever," "He who is over all is God, blessed for ever," "Christ as concerning the flesh, God be (or is) blessed for ever."

In the midst of so much uncertainty, what

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can decide, except the test of the simple and easily understood passages?

In Titus ii., 13, one reading is: "the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ," and another is: "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Here the question arises: "Are Jesus Christ and the great God to be identified or distinguished from each other? This is a case in which the application of the worthless and misleading rules of Middleton and Sharp on the Greek article would identify the two as one. But the simple passages would condemn such an identification, and take the passage as similar, in sense to 1 Cor. i., 3, "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," where the names are mutually exclusive.

The same remarks apply to 2 Peter i., 1, which has been translated in two ways: "our God and Savior, Jesus Christ," and "our God and the Savior Jesus Christ." In 1 Peter ii., 5, it is noticeable that Peter makes the terms "God" and "Jesus Christ" mutually exclusive: "acceptable to God thru Jesus Christ."

Hebrews i., 8 applies to the Son of God Psalm xlv., 6: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." This quotation is from the Septuagint, and does not necessarily represent the Hebrew, which is verse 7 of the psalm. Another translation is that given in the margin of the

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Standard American Revised edition: "Thy throne is the throne of God." This is one of those cases in which an argument is based on the Septuagint when, if the Hebrew had been referred to, there would be no place for such an argument. Verse 9, "Therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee," would show that, in the mouth of a Jew, one Being would never have been called God, and yet be anointed by another Being who is his God. It is remarkable how, in the face of such a fact, the power of a theological tradition has endeavored to support this duality in the Deity. In the margin of King James's version of Psalm xlv., 7, this duality is emphasized by rendering the verse thus: "Therefore, O God, thy God hath anointed thee." The verse in question is capable of more than one meaning. The application of the clear and unambiguous passages would at once decide which meaning must be the correct one.

Besides, verses 1 and 11 assert that the psalm refers to a King. Verses 9 and 14 present him as having a queen, with kings' daughters as his loved females, called in English his "honorable women," and virgins, the companions of his queen. In addition to this, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews has, in verses 5 and 6, spoken of "angels," thus

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copying from the Septuagint, when the Hebrew says "gods." The argument is based on a false rendering. The true reading has no comparison between Christ and angels. The quotations from the second psalm, 2 Sam. vii., 14; 1 Chron. xxii., 10 and xxviii., 6; Deut. xxxii., 43 (from the Septuagint); and Psalm xcvi., 7, have no reference either to angels or to the Son of God.

Hebrews i., 10 quotes Psalm cii., 25, and applies it to the Son of God. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands." The words quoted refer to Jehovah, who asserts that there is no God besides himself; and they have no allusion to the Son of God.

Much theological use has been made of Heb. ix., 22, as if the verse taught the impossibility of forgiveness apart from the shedding of blood and as if that were a fundamental principle of divine government. Yet a wholly different meaning must be given to the passage when it is compared with Levit. v., 11, where atonement is said to be made by means of a handful of flour. This is confirmed by the words, in English, "I may almost say," and by the fact that, in the Greek, the force of the word *schēdon* covers the whole verse, and not merely the

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first part alone of it. The application of such simple statements as those in Ezekiel xviii., 28 and xxxiii., 14-16, would solve the question of which interpretation is the correct one.

In King James's version of Heb. iii., 16, we read: "For some, when they had heard, did provoke; howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses." In the Revised Version we read: "For who, when they heard, did provoke? nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses?" There is not merely ambiguity here, but positive contradiction. How is the mere reader of English to decide which of the two translations is to be chosen? To him, they seem to rest solely on authority, either of the original translators or of the revisers. Those who know Greek, however, are aware that the solution of the question depends, to some degree, upon punctuation and accent. In the earliest Uncial MSS. no accents and no punctuation appear. The Greek word for "some" is *tines*. If a grave accent be put upon the final syllable, "some" will be the correct rendering. If an accute accent be put upon the first syllable, the word will be the interrogative "who," and a note of interrogation must mark the sentences as questions. But a simpler solution of the question is open to the mere English reader, by applying the clear and

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simple quotation of Numbers xiv., 2, which decides in favor of the Revised Version: "And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses."

The importance of what has been here said of Jesus Christ and the unity of God may be seen from some sentiments of Jews recently published. They will show how necessary it is to discriminate between what Scripture teaches and what theology has said, and not to force upon students of "divinity," upon Jews, Mohammedans and heathen people, as Christianity, what is only the honest but mistaken judgment of speculative theologians.

In a work written by a Jewess who accepts the Messiahship of Jesus, and his birth from a virgin, a work which bears the title of "Israel Lo Ammi," the authoress says of Jesus: "Since those who claim to be his followers have perverted his teaching in daily life, perhaps they have perverted his teaching in declaring the Trinity."

A work has been published by a Jewish gentleman of Montreal, entitled "A Jewish reply to Christian Evangelists." This book shows a considerable knowledge of history, and a far wider reading than the author, in his modesty, claims. But, for confounding theology with the New Testament, and for fierceness in at-

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tack upon the latter, under such misapprehension, I know of nothing equal to it since the time of Col. Robert Ingersoll. Near the beginning of the book, the author says "What does the New Testament teach? It teaches a fantastic theory, built up on a foundation of heathen mythology and philosophy, of a triumvirate of gods."

If anything were needed to show the importance of a candid examination of the principles of the Interpretation of Scripture, it would be a sentence like that.

But, not only do Jews object to the confounding of traditional theology with the Scriptures: Christians do, also.

It is George Adam Smith, in his work "Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament," who says of the prophecies: "They have been too hastily used as predictions of the Godhead of the Messiah. But not even do the names in chapter ix., 6 f. (of Isaiah) imply Deity."

It is Adolph Harnack, in his "What is Christianity?" who, writing of the theology of the Greek Church, says: "In its completed form, it must look strange to any one who comes to it straight from the evangelists." "The whole fabric of ecclesiastical Christology is a thing

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absolutely outside the concrete personality of Jesus Christ."

In summing up his reasons for interpreting what the New Testament says of Jesus Christ as the true sense in which to speak of his Deity, Dr. King, of Oberlin, in his "Reconstruction in Theology," says: "He is, thus, for us the Ideal realized, from whom we would take nothing away, to whom we can conceive nothing to be added." He says, also: "To affirm social relations, therefore, in the Godhead is to assert absolute tritheism. And no possible manipulation of the terms can avoid it." "We believe in one God, our Father, concretely and supremely revealed and brought nigh with absolute and abiding assurance in Christ." "This is the great practical New Testament confession of faith, contained both in the apostolic benediction and in the baptismal formula." "And this is the very significance of Christ that *God* is in him, speaks and works thru him."

According to this examination of the Bible, and these quotations from modern thinkers, we should cease to speak of the Deity *of* Christ, and use the Savior's own expression of the Deity *in* Christ.

From these quotations it will be seen how terribly Mr. Hart has misunderstood both the New Testament and the opinions of enlight-

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ened Christians of to-day, and how important it is that those Christians who are not enlightened should be taught to subject traditional theology and ambiguous passages of Scripture to the test of passages that are simple and unambiguous.

9.

Where passages are capable of more than one meaning, give due weight to each before rejecting it for the other. It is customary to consider the expression "born of water and the Spirit" as referring to baptism, and parts of the baptismal service both of the Anglican Church and the English Free Churches, are based on that conception.

But, judging from the figurative genius of Jewish thought, it is probable that we have here a case of the figure called "hendiadys," in which a double form of expression signifies a single thing. In this case, the real sense appears to be "born of the water, or seed, of the Spirit." The present writer has elsewhere given his reasons at large for believing this to be the case.

The Rev. Dr. Jacob, formerly Head Master of Christ's Hospital, London, says on this passage: "I do not think it at all certain that these

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words refer to baptism, * * * such reference is by no means certain. The words probably allude to water as a common emblem of the Divine Spirit's operation in purifying the heart from sin."

Meyer, also, agrees with Dr. Jacob.

It is quite common to render the figure "born again" so as to mean a change in spirit and life taking place subsequent to personal repentance and faith; and on this are based earnest appeals, and not seldom narrow denunciations, in evangelistic meetings. Sometimes it is referred to effects supposed to be produced thru the sacrament of baptism. But the rendering given in the margin of the Revised Version relates to source, rather than time, and is, no doubt, more correct: "born from above" does not lend itself to any mere change in emotions or sacramental effects, any more than it does to the sacrament itself. It means, doubtless, endowed by divine love with power to live a godly life.

At the risk of some repetition, it may be said, while presenting a truth in a new aspect, that it is the fashion to interpret the preamble of John's gospel as if he, the Jew, had adopted the metaphysical conceptions of a kind of Greek philosophy. Taking him, however, as a Jew, whose thought would naturally be poetic,

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and remembering his poetical language of God's being Love, of Love's being Life, and of Love and Life being seen and handled, that preamble sounds more of poetry than philosophy.

The word Logos, with its threefold meaning of the faculty of thought, the ideal product of that faculty, and the outward expression of that product, a word, tho generally translated as if it had the latter meaning only, lends itself to a most beautiful and poetic conception. An eternal divine thought, the moulding source of all creation, the very essence of the divine life, embodying itself by divine power in a living man, who thus becomes the expression of the divine thought, the divine Word, as a light flashing forth thru the transparent tent of human flesh, for the restoration of erring humanity, is at once sublimely poetic and accords with apostolic utterances of an eternal purpose manifested in the last age of a progressive world.

A philosophic bent of mind would scarcely seem a thing to commend a disciple to the Savior; but a poetic insight into sublimest truth would surely endear itself to him who ever sought the spirit underneath the letter. Such a conception as this preserves all that divine connection with Jesus, our Savior, which

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secures him from the "mere manhood" of Socinians, and avoids the inexpressible confusion of popular theology. It is, at least, one of the possible meanings of John's preamble, and one which secures it from the suspicion of its being the product of another and a later hand.

The prevailing view of the preamble, that the Logos, in English rendered "the Word," was a self-conscious being, whose personality was perpetuated in Jesus Christ, has commended itself to too many thoughtful men to be lightly regarded. It is not to be rejected until it has been clearly proved that it accords not with the Scriptures which it seems to explain. Yet the certainty that it is not the only possible explanation of the preamble, and, also, that it leads to inexplicable confusion, should make those who accept it refrain, even if they should be a majority, from harsh measures, or the severity of excluding from the Church those who think they have a better explanation of the one fact accepted by both classes of thinkers, the Manifestation, or Incarnation, of the eternal Logos in "the man Christ Jesus." The very word "Incarnation" is rescued from a materialistic or mechanical meaning, like that of the Buddhistic incarnation of the son of Maia described by Sir Edwin Arnold, by us-

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ing it in its figurative or poetic signification. This poetic meaning rescues it, too, from any chemical aspect, as of a compound made up of two more simple elements.

It has been thought by theologians that the word "This," in 1 John v., 20, another case of ambiguity, refers to the word "Son" which precedes it, as if it meant: "This Son is the true God." They are conscientious in their belief, and should not be condemned as unchristian; tho the reference of "This" is, doubtless, to "God" in verse 19. The sense of the passage is, probably: "This God, of whom the Son of God has given us an understanding, is the true God, and we are in him when we are in his Son Jesus Christ."

It has been the custom of many to take the word "baptize" as meaning only "immerse." But, in the margin of the Revised Greek Testament, on Mark vii., the word so rendered is, in different manuscripts, equivalent to washing, which took place in various ways. The same word is used in the very early work called "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" for both dipping and pouring. Origen, in speaking of Elijah's act of pouring water on the sacrifice, calls the act by the term baptize. Therefore, even if that term should be taken as ambiguous in meaning, it is unwise to commit

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the Scriptures to one meaning only of a word which copyists of Scripture, and writers of other literature, certainly used with another meaning.

It is thought by some that a peculiar use of the article in the Greek Testament decides the meaning of certain passages. Mr. Granville Sharp has given a rule on that use, to the following effect: Where attributes in the same case are joined by a copulative conjunction, if the first attribute alone has the article, they relate to the same person; but, if more attributes than one have the article, they relate to different persons.

After a careful examination of this rule, and one by Bishop Middleton, which is supposed to be the converse of Sharp's, extending over more than thirty years, the present writer is convinced that this rule is of no value whatever. It has too many exceptions, even in the New Testament, to warrant its use as a rule. Besides, it is not the logical converse of Middleton's; it proves too much when applied to the interpretation of Scripture; it is not supported by competent critics; it is not supported by the classics, as for instance, Herodotus, Lucian, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato and Demosthenes; it is not supported by the Apocrypha; in Esdras, Tobit and Judith; the three pas-

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sages to which it may be applied are capable of a wholly different interpretation from that which it suggests; and it violates rules of interpretation that are well established.

These are but a few out of many passages and topics on which candor demands a suspension of judgment, at least, before rejecting one interpretation for another, or condemning those who, after careful study, prefer the one to the other.

10.

Observe the value of what is called Hebrew parallelism. This is a literary peculiarity of ancient Jewish thinkers. It is the expression of one thought in two or more differently worded propositions, and is common in the book of Proverbs. Sometimes this parallelism furnishes us with what the Scriptures rarely give, that is, definitions of terms. These definitions, again, guide us in interpreting other passages. For example, in Luke i., 35, we read: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee." This, reported in Greek, was so said by the angel to a Hebrew, and gives the idiom of her nation. The Holy Spirit is the power of the Most High; and we have one thing, the

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divine action in the production of a miracle, expressed in two ways. But, in the sentences which run parallel to each other, we have a definition of the Holy Spirit. It is suggestive that the word translated *power* is *dynamis*, the spiritual dynamic force of God.

The translators of John xiv.-xvi., forgetting this parallelism and its teaching, have, when writing of the Holy Spirit, used the word "he" when a pronoun was needed. Theologians have endeavored to justify this by saying that John, in the Greek, used masculine pronouns in reference to a noun which is neuter. This, however, is not the case. Two nouns in Greek are used for the Holy Spirit. One, the word rendered "Spirit," which refers to the thing itself, is neuter. The other, which relates to an office performed by the Spirit, the noun rendered "Comforter," is, in Greek, masculine. John's grammar here is faultless. When reference is to the office, his pronouns are masculine, as they should be. When allusion is made to the agent, the pronouns are, as they should be, neuter. John's use of the pronouns was guided by no theological, but only by grammatical, considerations. The translators, however, have been so greatly under the influence of a prevailing theology that they have put "he," "him" and "whom" where the masculine is not

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appropriate. A most glaring instance of this subjection of the sense of Scripture to theology is found, also, in Acts v., 32, where "which" should have been used instead of "whom," since the author of the Scripture has given the neuter. Taking as correct the definition of the Holy Spirit involved in the message of the angel, the only definition of it given in Scripture, the word "he" cannot be otherwise than misleading. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the interpretation of Scripture does not mean the echo of any theology, but the ascertaining of what the writer of Scripture meant. "He" should be "it."

II.

In interpreting parables, keep to the main thought, and do not give force to details not essential to that thought. For instance, in the parables recorded by Luke xiii., 18-21, where the kingdom of God is compared to mustard seed and leaven, the chief thought is that of growth. But it would be a misinterpretation of the parable if it were taken to imply that growth of a condition amongst men of self-determining wills is an automatic process such as that of chemistry and the merely material de-

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velopment of vegetation. The Kingdom of God never grows automatically. Men must teach truth and receive it, act uprightly, justly and purely, set good examples, and curtail public evils before God's will can be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

12.

Remember the frailties of human nature, and the defects of all human things. The Bible contains a treasure of inestimable value, but it is an earthen vessel. So it was with the writers themselves. Human language is meagre and unsatisfactory, even at the best. Words easily mislead. The Jew may speak of some one as a "first-born" or an "only-begotten"; and his meaning may be metaphorical, rather than literal. He may mean what the corresponding Hebrew words sometimes mean, precious, dear, important, chief. Some man, not a figure-loving Jew, and not familiar with Hebrew thought, may see the word, and import into it the notion of time, instead of value, and, by literalizing it, miss entirely the Jew's meaning. Take Psalm lxxxix., 27, for instance: "I also will make him first-born, the highest of the kings." The author of this

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could have had no thought of past time here, but only of a future time, and to insert the past into the passage would be to hide the real significance of the term. "First-born," here, referring to David, even if taken in reference to the Messiah, is figurative, not literal, and refers to a dignity to come. We cannot make a man into something that he has always been, which must be the case with one literally born first.

If this figurative sense of "first-born" as a term of honor and affection seems appropriate, how much more so must be the term "only-begotten," implying, as it does, not merely priority in affection, but the absence of all rivalry or division in preciousness.

Again, take the writing on the cross. Four forms of it are given, no two of which agree. Frailty of memory accounts for the variety better than any assumption of falsehood; and a choice must be allowed in selecting the reading which has the greatest probability, if we wish to go beyond the fact that in the three languages chosen, one such inscription was given.

Then, where in Acts ix., 7, Paul's companions are said to have heard the voice that spoke to him, and in Acts xxii., 9, where Paul's address includes the statement that they did not

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hear it, we are assured that the same man who makes the first assertion also reports the speech that contradicts him. Human frailty again plays its part; and, in our interpretation, we are obliged to suppose that the statement that the men did not hear may have really meant that they did not so hear as to distinguish articulate sounds.

Coming to the Book with the charity that "believeth all things," we must not be surprised if we find theories of literary infallibility compelled to yield to facts that, sometimes, leave our best attempts at interpretation seriously at fault.

13.

Remember that Jesus Christ and His disciples, being Jews, could not favor any interpretation contrary to the fundamental teaching of the law and the prophets. One of our most useful Sunday School publications, commenting on the Savior's use of the expression "I am," bases on it the statement that Jesus was the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In this, it followed the teaching of certain theologians. Isaiah, chapter liii., 6-10, however, says: "Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all"; "It pleased Jehovah to bruise him"; "the pleas-

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ure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand." All this is said of the Servant of Jehovah, and finds its truest fulfillment in Christ, the Messiah: did Isaiah, or God speaking thru Isaiah, mean that the one on whom iniquity was laid, the one who was bruised, the one in whose hand Jehovah's pleasure prospered, was himself the Jehovah who laid on him the iniquity, who bruised him, and whose pleasure prospered in his hand? Isaiah evidently knew nothing of this confounding of the actor and the one acted upon. It was bad enough for the theologians to represent the inexplicable fact of the union of the Deity and humanity in Jesus Christ in such a way as to stun the intellect with inextricable confusion, and to call the confusion they themselves had created a sacred mystery. But the attempt to impose upon the youth of our Sunday Schools as sacred truth what contradicts the very prophecy that the Messiah came to confirm, deserves nothing less than a stern rebuke.

The expression "I am," without any completion of the predicate, was an idiom of speech employed by others, as well as the Savior, and did not involve any such meaning as that imported into it by that Sunday School publication, and its instigators, the theologians. In Luke xxi., 8, Christ represents the deceivers

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who were to come after him as saying simply, "I am." In John ix., 9, the man born blind answers his questioners in the same terms "I am." The words in English, printed in Italics, after the word "am," have nothing in the Greek corresponding to them.

The misfortune of much of our theology is that those who first began to frame it, with one notable exception, Origen, knew little or nothing of the Jewish language and modes of thought and speech; and their interpretations, followed by vast majorities who accept their decisions as final, need to be revised in harmony with the more extensive and accurate knowledge of to-day.

Similar remarks apply to the famous passage in John x., 30: "I and my Father are one." The New Testament was written in Greek, a language of which the mass of people, and many modern graduates of universities, know nothing. The exclusion of that language by professedly Christian people from many college courses of study leaves even educated men and women incapable of judging for themselves the meaning of what is pressed upon them as the Word of God. They are dependent upon translations which often cannot correctly render the original language. Grave mistakes thus arise; reiteration of these errors

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thru generations makes them, in the popular estimation, seem sacred truths; conduct is based upon them; prejudices, often bitter, arise; and ecclesiastical force is sometimes used to prevent enlightenment and reform. The habit is formed of referring the interpretation of Scripture to ecclesiastical authority, a practice sure to end, sooner or later, in some form of a Papacy.

This causes one of the chief difficulties of a clergyman's position. His duty is to present the truth of Scripture; while his people know nothing of the language in which that truth is conveyed; and, on that account, may find a sufficient explanation irksome. What would be tedious in a sermon may, however, be more easily understood, if it can be calmly read, and quietly and patiently tested, until the sense becomes clear.

The true meaning of the passage here discussed may be learned from the grammatical construction of the passage, and from the use of similar constructions in other parts of the New Testament.

In the Greek of that passage, the word "one" is neuter, *hen*. If this were masculine, *heis*, the verse could possibly have the meaning "one Being." Then there would arise a mystery how two Beings could be one Being. But, as

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the word "one" is neuter, it cannot have that meaning.

The Greek word may be in the nominative case. Some scholars, however, have taken it as if it were in the accusative case, which is of the same form as the nominative, and governed by a preposition not expressed, as "at one," or "for one." The passage so explained would mean: "I and my Father are at one, agreed." It would be as if Christ said: "No one is able to snatch aught out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are at one on that point; therefore no one shall pluck them out of my hand." That is not the meaning Christ's enemies put upon his words, but there is no reason why we should misinterpret him as they did.

What the passage means is best learned, however, by observing the sense in other passages where the same form of speech occurs. In John xvii., 11, we read Christ's prayer for his disciples, "that they may be one, even, as we are." In verse 21 we read "that all may be one." In verse 22, it is said "that all may be one even as we are one." In verse 23, an equivalent expression is used, "that they may be perfected into one." The Greek for "into one" is *eis hen*. In 1 Cor. iii., 8, we read: "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one." In Ephesians ii., 14, Paul, speaking of

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those that were far from God and those that were near, Gentiles and Jews, says of Christ: "who made both one."

In all these passages, the term "one" is, in Greek, *hen*, the neuter singular. The meaning in every passage appears substantially to be: "in agreement." The unity of Jesus and the Father is just such as may be between Christ's disciples, who, being many, cannot be one and the same Being. If they are organized into one community, it can be only a unity of agreement. Paul, the planter, and Apollos, the waterer, cannot be one Being, or one organic unity. The Jews as one race, and the Gentiles, as another, taken together, were on one footing, but were not one Being or one organism. But all can be in harmony, one in spirit, character, purpose, hope and love, one in agreement, united on certain principles of life and conduct.

No doubt, then, when the Savior used the passage here commented on, his meaning was that which we find in the common usage of the same form of words as illustrated by the six or seven passages quoted. The assertion of an inexplicable mystery cannot fairly be deduced from this passage. The common and obvious meaning of the original is too simple for that, tho the English translation makes the

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passage suggest a mystery. But the New Testament was not originally given in English, and its meaning must be decided by the language in which it was given.

14.

Take particular statements along with the general argument to which they belong. Few things contribute more to misconception of the meaning of the Scriptures than the practice of separating isolated passages from the context. It used to be the common impression amongst Christian people that Isa. lxiii., 1, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" related to the Messiah, Christ. No less distinguished a person than Bishop Lowth begins his exposition of that verse by deliberately separating it from what precedes it; and then, by allegorizing the names Edom and Bozrah, he proceeds to apply the passage to Christ and to his instrumentality in "God's vengeance upon the wicked." In chapter lxii., 11, 12, however, a promise is given of deliverance to Jerusalem, and the hero who comes from Edom, in chapter lxiii., is the coming deliverer of the "city not forsaken." The blood that stains his garments is not his own, but

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that of his enemies; and the allusion cannot be to Jesus of Nazareth, who never trod down the peoples in his anger, made them drunk in his fury, and poured out their lifeblood on the earth, as this deliverer is said to do.

The words "he that cometh to God must believe that he is," in Heb. xi., 6, if taken alone, might represent a conclusion from some one's conduct, as if it meant: "he would not come, if he did not believe." If taken as part of the writer's argument, however, the words present a condition and not a conclusion. The practical value of this may be seen in that the words have an important bearing on missions, meaning that, to come to God, men must know of his existence and character, and that, in this case, ignorance is not bliss.

15.

Make allowance for oriental brevity and exaggeration. As an instance of the former, it will be enough to notice John vii., 16: "My teaching is not mine." The introduction of the word "only" will rescue the statement from the appearance of contradiction: "not mine only" will give the true sense. The following may be added.

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In John ix., 3, we have: "Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents," which literally renders the original, but which is so brief that it might be taken as implying a sinlessness to which no human life can lay claim. The meaning lies beyond the mere words in brief statements like that, and the true interpretation will not keep to the mere literal rendering of the words. In this case, the French translator, Segond, has given the sense better than the English. *Ce n'est pas que lui ou ses parents aient péché*—it is not because he or his parents sinned."

An instance of exaggeration may be found in Luke xiv., 26: "If any man hateth not his father, etc." Hateth here evidently means "is prepared to lose." To hate a parent, in our sense of the term, does not make a man a disciple of Jesus the Christ.

16.

Distinguish, when necessary, the writer's conclusion from the argument by which he seeks to sustain it. The rabbinical method of training sometimes led to a use of Scripture which our sense of honesty condemns. That method demanded the support by quotations

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from Scripture, of a practice condemned by the law. This was accomplished by putting meanings on Scripture which it did not originally bear, and by taking Scriptural passages away from their context. The habit of so using Scripture, even for legitimate ends, is not without instances in the New Testament. Paul, for instance, in Galatians iii., 16, refers to Genesis xii., 7, and talmudically bases his conclusion that the Gentiles gain the blessing of Abraham thru Jesus Christ on the ground that the promise was given to seed, and not to seeds, and that the seed referred to was Christ. The conclusion stands: the argument for it cannot. Seed is a collective term, and is so used in the Old Testament, and implies posterity in the plural sense.

A case referred to under another head may give an illustration here. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews uses Scripture in a similar way. In the first chapter and eighth verse, he quotes from Psalm xlv., 6, 7, and argues for the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels, by asserting that the passage in the psalm quoted refers to the Son of God. The conclusion is correct: the argument intended to support it is not. An examination of the psalm shows that the person referred to is a king whose queen has for her attendants

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maiden daughters of kings. This can have no reference to Jesus of Nazareth, but is appropriate to the king mentioned in the first verse of the psalm, and for whom the writer of it asserts that it was composed.

17.

Do not subject the grammatical simplicity of the original to the exigencies of theological systems or ecclesiastical formularies.

There are advantages in fixed liturgical formularies. The use of them does not necessarily tend to formalism. But they are not without grave disadvantages. This is peculiarly so when, apart from the expression of universal facts of human and Christian experience, they endeavor to express phases of opinion that necessarily vary with the progress of knowledge. Those who prepare the formularies almost unavoidably express the prevailing theological and exegetical opinions of their times. When increasing knowledge has led the world to more enlightened times, the written word of the formularies remains, becomes a fetter on progress, and demands revision or leads to subterfuge in the interpretation of them. The interests of truth require us to ex-

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amine popular interpretations of Scripture, especially those which are found in such formularies, lest tradition should misplace the word of God, which the Savior assures us is truth.

In Romans xii., 6, there is a word which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is the word *analogia*. It may mean either proportion or analogy. The general directions of the apostle favor the first of these meanings. Gifts of God are said to be made in certain proportions. To one man is given one; to another man, another, but not all to any one. Paul's argument is that we should devote ourselves to the exercise of that portion of God's gracious gifts which he has imparted to us. If God has given to any of us faith and the power to preach, or prophesy, Paul argues that we should preach just so far as we believe.

Some theologians, however, say that the passage means that we should preach according to the general sense of Scripture, or what they call "the analogy of faith." In practice nevertheless, this means that we should make all Scripture bend to some dogmatic system. Inasmuch as the New Testament was neither all written nor compiled when Paul wrote that passage, and there could, consequently, then be no such Christian general sense of Scripture, this meaning could not be his. He must

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have meant "Preach so far as you believe." His words give no countenance to the subjection of every expression to the demands of any given system of theology.

Instances are not lacking in which the meaning of simple words, which do not support certain theories, are made to do so in translations by subjecting them to the claims of theoretical systems. Purely grammatical distinctions are ignored, and made to imply personal distinctions, solely to conform to some such system. The use of pronouns referring, in John, to Spirit and Comforter has been already noticed and need not be here repeated. But why, in John xiv., 17, 26 and Acts v., 32, is the neuter rendered *whom*, when the Greek means *which*? Why is it that, in Rom. viii., 16, the Greek neuter *auto* is rendered *himself*, instead of *itself*? The only answer that can be given is that such renderings are demanded by the exigencies of what is called "systematic theology." But when did the Head of the Church authorize us to substitute the theories of theologians for the plain meaning of the Scriptures, or to present to the world as Christianity the artificial systems of ecclesiastics?

Another instance is found in the meanings imposed upon such passages as 2 Cor. viii., 9 and Philip ii., 6, 7. In the passage from Cor-

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inthians, the usual sense given to Paul's words is that the Messiah became poor after having been rich in a former state of being. In the passage from Philippians, it is customary to assume Paul's meaning to be that Jesus Christ, having existed previously to his birth in the form of God, emptied himself of that dignity and became a man. It will be noticed that, in both cases, a verb in the aorist is associated with a participle. In Corinthians, we have *eptocheusen plousios ōn*, "he became poor, being rich." In Philippians, we have *en morphē theou hyparchōn **** heauton ekenōsen*, "existing in the form of God, he emptied himself." The participles are in the present tense.

u/ The grammatical rule governing such cases is this: When the act indicated by the verb, and the state indicated by the participle, are contemporaneous, the participle is put in the present tense; but, when the participle represents a state or condition prior to that indicated by the principal verb, the participle is put in a past tense. Instances of this are given by Harkness, Anthon, Bullions, Goodwin, Cur-tis, Kühner and Farrar, while Winer shows the same rule to apply to New Testament Greek.

Applying the rule, then, to the passages in question, Christ's riches and poverty were con-

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temporaneous, and must be so explained. So, also, the form of God represented by Christ was contemporaneous with his emptying himself of it, and must not be taken as something which existed prior to his birth.

The word *hyparchōn*, which is supposed to indicate that priority of existence, gives, in the New Testament, no warrant for such a supposition. The verb, of which this is a participle, occurs in the New Testament 48 times; in Luke, seven times; in Acts, 26 times; in Romans, once; in 1 Cor., four times; in 2 Cor., twice; in Gala., twice; in Philip., twice; in James, once; and in 2 Peter, thrice. The neuter participle, used as a noun, occurs 14 times. The allied noun, *hyparxis*, occurs twice. Of these 64 cases, not one instance refers to a previous state of existence. The American standard Revision of the New Testament, the best yet issued, has rendered the word correctly, simply "existing." Why, in the face of these facts, do theologians still insist upon supporting the rendering given in the margin of the English Revision, "being originally"? It is only because a dominant theological system seems to demand it. Some other theory of the "Kenosis" than the one which confounds the intelligence of theological students must be sought, unless the word of God, the truth, is

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to be made of worse than no effect by this bondage to tradition.

If this paper should ever happen to fall into the hands of a clergyman he is exhorted to remember the force of his ordination vows. These pledge him to study such things as will help him to understand the Scriptures; and then they say that he must drive away all thoughts that he, himself, is persuaded are contrary to the Scriptures. In the United States, he is specially pledged to drive them "from the Church," if he should find them sustained by it. This personal investigation, persuasion and authority ought to result in the most thorough upholding of the sense of Scripture, apart from the dominating force of traditional systems which pervert that sense.

18.

Take to the study of Scripture the childlike spirit of the charity that "thinketh no evil," but "believeth all things," holding fast that which is good. In civilized law, a prisoner is assumed to be innocent until he is proved guilty. The Bible should not be treated with less consideration than a prisoner. Its statements should be assumed to be true until our conception of them, or they themselves, be proved false. No

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circumstantial evidence should be allowed to contribute to the assumption of falsity in those statements before investigation has certainly condemned them. The time is not in the very remote past, when it was regarded as essential that we should hold the Bible to be infallible in every one of its statements. Few maintain that position now. Where inconsistent and contradictory narratives of the same events exist, as in the cases of Ahaziah and the writing on the cross; where the derivation of names is manifestly incorrect or absurd; where the meaning of passages is dubious; where interpolations have been inserted; and where various readings exist, it is folly to insist upon literary infallibility.

The child who, in the beginning of his life, assumes as true all that his parents tell him may, in after days, be compelled to view in a larger light what his parents said, and he may be compelled to reject entirely what he was formerly taught. But is it not better for the child to begin by taking for granted what father and mother say than to begin by doubts of their word, and by refusal to obey? We are but children even in mature years; and it is not good for us to approach the Bible with the assumption, or even the suspicion, that what we read there is false.

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Once, it was assumed that the land of Bashan could never have held the population ascribed to it in Scripture. Now, travellers confirm the statement of the great possibilities of its "giant cities." Many almost incredible things are found to be truly recorded, when we learn more than we formerly knew.

The Scriptures can never be correctly interpreted if we go to them with the assumption that what is called the supernatural must be eliminated or reduced to the smallest proportions. It is better to assume that the narratives of miracles, when defined by the three terms used in Scripture to describe them, are true, until we are compelled by facts otherwise to explain them, than first to deny the possibility of them, only to find, subsequently, that we were mistaken. Scripture calls what we term miracles wonderful things, signs and powers. They are wonderful events which are signs in one realm of life of the presence of the superior powers of a higher realm; they are not violations of nature, but signs of the action of a wider nature than that with which we are commonly familiar. Scripture can be correctly interpreted only by him who believes in the interlacing of the affairs of this world with those of a realm not yet visible to us.

CHAPTER III.

GOD'S VOICE IN THE BIBLE.

I.

Seek for the divine voice that speaks thru the Scriptures. What has hitherto been written has reference to the human authorship of the Bible. But is there no other voice to be heard speaking thru its pages? If there is, how may we recognize that voice and what it says?

The question here is not about historic accuracy. It is not about biographical or tribal dates. It is not about the authorship of documents, and the dates of their publication. It touches not the matter of Darius the Mede, or whether the use of Greek terms in the book of Daniel proves the late date of its composition. It ignores the topic of the age of Methuselah. It is not concerned with the fragmentary character of the book of Genesis. It leaves such questions to be decided by intellectual research. It lies deeper than mere intellect. It touches

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matters of life and hope and destiny. It deals not with the intellectual and æsthetic soul, the *psyche*, but with the nobler spirit, the *pneuma*. When Christ spoke of Truth, it was the word of Life with which he was concerned.

We have the Savior's assurance that God's word is Truth. Truth is conformity to reality: have we in the Bible anything that may, in the things of the spirit, be depended upon as truth, anything conformed to reality, and that may be taken as an authoritative basis for conduct in life's varied relations? If so, we have God's voice, God's word, and not merely man's. How may we so interpret the Book as to be sure that we have the divine voice, and not merely the echo of changeable human opinions?

(a) *We must have a spiritual character, intelligent, upright, pure, loving and hopeful.* The writer had a fellow-student, admired and loved, superior to himself in calm, strong and accurate thinking, one who afterwards made his mark on the mission field of far off Japan; but that student could never see anything beautiful in Tennyson's "In Memoriam." Why? Because he had never had the poetic inborn insight developed thru the pain and grief of the shaking to its foundations of his faith in traditional forms of precious and enduring thought. Capacity to understand and feel had

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not been awakened. Yet the beauty in Tennyson's poem existed; and, to see it, nought was needed but the inner power of vision.

The writer once had, also, a cultured friend, a layman, who, tho familiar with ancient and modern languages, and the lore acquired in one of the theological colleges of England's church, could never see any sense in Euclid. Why? The mathematical faculty was wanting. Yet mathematical truth existed in Euclid.

So, in the study of the Bible, a special faculty is needed, to see that God is in it, and to hear what he says. A spiritual mind alone gives spiritual insight. The good seed fructifies only on good soil. Even such a mind, like that of Cowper, may be temporarily blinded; but, without the pure heart, God cannot be seen, and the dull, sensuous ear cannot hear his "still, small voice."

(b) *We must be familiar with God's voice heard outside the Bible.* The voice to which we are accustomed in the open air is easily recognized when it speaks within a building, in the just impulses of a loving heart, or in the enlightened moral convictions of mankind. God speaks in the open air. There, the prophets heard it, before it sounded in tabernacle or temple. There, the Savior heard it before he spoke it in the synagogue. God's voice may

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be heard in the silent sky, the equally silent rocks, the roar of the milky glacial stream, the crash of moving icy masses, driving boulders on the shore, the buried remnants of ancient plants and animals and men and dwellings; and its music may be heard in the songs of birds, the budding flowers, and the growth and movements of the circling spheres. He who has learned to recognize it there will not fail to hear it amidst and behind the human echoes of it in the temple of his Book. He has the sense of perceiving realities.

When the apparent meaning of a passage of Scripture contradicts the voice of God in his other sources of revelation, we must seek some other meaning that harmonizes with that voice. If Scripture seems to teach that Creation ceased years ago, and Astronomy proves that Creation is going on now, God points to some other explanation of Scripture as the true one. If Geology shows creation by natural forces, and the Bible seems to assert another method, God is warning us to find amongst the changing meanings of words and the varied forms of human thought some meaning that will not dispute the lessons of his own handiwork. If Archaeology proves the great antiquity of man, and the Bible seems to assert the contrary, God calls us to revise our study of the

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Bible; if it confirms the Bible's history, God calls us to stand by the truth of both. If Scripture seems to teach injustice or cruelty, God speaks to us in the language of John Wesley: "Whatever Scripture means, it cannot mean that."

If Scripture seems to say that, when an unexpected chance to kill one who has done us wrong presents itself, it is God who delivers him for our vengeance, or if it seems to say that, when a man smites a woman to immediate death, he is to be punished, but if she lingers in agony for a couple of days, and then dies from the blow, he is to go free, "because she is his money," and then presents that as a command of God, it suggests the question whether we have not forgotten the oriental idiom of the historian, who presents as the act of God the impulse to carry out what appeared to be right in a rude and cruel age. The juster sentiments of a Christian century are a better guide to discern the real teachings of God than the times when the 21st chapter of Exodus was penned.

(c) *We must test what the Bible says by the common experience of Christian people.* The value of an instrument is tested by the application of it to the uses of practical life. The Bible has been in use now for many centuries. To the Jew, part of it has been a guide

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for ages. It has gone with blessing to the wildest tribes of fierce and degraded humanity. Keen and learned hatred has sought in vain to exterminate it. Fanatics have built upon it their most fantastic schemes. Yet it lives and thrives. Literary men have found its compact and pregnant sentences the most powerful climax of their perorations. It has been the guide of Gentile kings. It has consoled the mourner and soothed the dying. Has Christian experience found in it anything lasting, unchangeable, perfect, divine?

One man may not find his experience always supported by that of another man; but, when it is confirmed by that of all other competent individuals, he may be assured that he has something that is not of individual origin, but something that comes from the Maker of all humanity.

Long centuries have passed since the psalms were written. In them are evidences of human imperfection and crude ideas of duty. But, on the whole, they touch the heart, express the convictions, and inspire the faith and hope of men to-day as no other words can do. Are not their acknowledgments of human frailty, their assurances of divine protection, and their expressions of comfort the echoes

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of a divine voice ever speaking unchangeable truths amidst the changing ages of the world?

To whom shall we attribute the calls of the prophets to righteousness in palace and hovel, if not to the voice of God speaking within them?

When Jesus Christ spoke for purity, justice, love and comfort, was the voice only that of an enthusiastic peasant, or were not his words the very words of God spoken in and by him?

The centuries pass; but the experience of men, both Jews and Gentiles, confirms belief that the voice of God has been speaking, and still speaks, thru the pages of that sacred book we call the Bible.

It would check the vagaries of little groups of people, if they would ask, before multiplying petty sects, whether their views have been confirmed by the wide experience of Christians in all ages and lands. It would save large groups of people from tyranny, and the world from revolutions, if they would ask, before enacting laws of sternness and rigidity, whether any conscientious people, even in small numbers, have found the views of majorities contradicted by the learning and experience of the few. The testimony chosen must be the experience of a real universality, not that of a

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factitious catholicity, or a spurious evangelicism.

The kindly human instincts which common Christian experience perfects may be trusted to guide when theories give confusing, revolting and horrible interpretations.

Trying the Scriptures by these three touchstones, a spiritual character, a knowledge of the voice of nature and history, and confirmation by the experience of all godly Christian people, we shall scarcely fail to find in them the true gold of a divine teaching.

We can perceive realities that we cannot see. We cannot see what we call electricity, yet we know that it is a reality. We cannot see what we call ether, yet we know that the word designates something real. By cultivating the proper faculties, we can just as truly discover the reality which we call the voice of God.

2.

What may we conclude is God's thought, that reality to which all human expression of truth more or less closely conforms, that treasure which the earthen vessels contain?

(a) Take, first, the notion of a single Deity. The Talmud says that Abram, when a

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child, saw the waning light of sun, moon and stars, concluded that they were no gods, but that some one unseen power controlled them all, and he worshipped that one Deity. When men formed that notion, however they reached it, was it mere imagination, or was it a discovery of something real? Or, to put it another way, did reality reveal itself to men? Was it taught by flesh and blood alone, or did the Father then reveal the fact? Abraham, Moses and the prophets proclaim it. Apostles assure us that "to us there is one God, the Father." Jesus Christ speaks of him as "my God and your God." Universal Christian instinct and experience confirm the voice of nature in saying that the Power of powers is one. Olympus and the Pantheon are dead. Why? Because the voice that speaks with no Delphic obscurity, when it proclaims the unity of God, is recognized by the competent judgment of men as the voice of the Deity itself: "I am Jehovah and there is none else: besides me there is no God." Isa. xiv., 5.

If what good men have thus seen and learned is true, it follows that the same divine guidance that led their minds to perceive the truth led them in writing the records of their vision, also. The same inspiration that gave them understanding leaves its impress upon their writ-

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ings, and so God spoke in times past to our fathers by the prophets, and their Scriptures were inspired by him.

(b) Take the thought of one providential guidance and development in creation and history up to a divine moral ideal. Alike from Scripture and science we learn that the world and civilization have grown, not automatically, but under the touch of a hand unseen by material eyes. A shapeless world takes form. A lifeless world becomes inhabited. Lower forms of life are followed by higher. Man appears. At first, naked, homeless, without tools, he learns to use fire, and makes instruments of use and refinement. A nation of slaves appears, and is trained by adversity to conquer nature and men. It lives and prospers by its faith in one Deity and one goodness. It suffers and dies when unfaithful. Without that Deity and that law of goodness, refinement only degrades all other nations. With them, poverty and trial but strengthen and multiply that favored people. The thought of that Deity becomes the germ of all future moral development. The prophets judge individuals and the State according to that God and that law, and the nation flourishes or withers, as it hearkens to their voice or rejects it. The ideal

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of human duty and perfectness centres in the ideal of God.

The development is there, open to the eyes of all who can see. What caused it? Was it mere chance? Was it the outcome of an automatic and unintelligent force? The Book says it was the effect of one guiding Spirit. "By his Spirit the heavens are garnished." Job xxvi., 13. "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty giveth me life," Job xxxiii., 4. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts," Zechar. iv., 6. Is the Book right? When the Jew believed in the guidance of the Spirit of God, was it a dream of the imagination, or was it an insight into reality? We can but answer: "there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding," Job xxxii., 8. In both Hebrew and Greek, spirit and breath are expressed by one word. If nature and life have been developed until an incomparable moral ideal has been reached, it can be accounted for only by the reality of that in which both Christian and Jew believe, the Spirit of the living God, that has led us to the height from which we beheld it.

(c) Take the one embodiment of the divine, spiritual and moral ideal in Jesus, the Christ. That ideal was eternal. No age can

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say: "It began with me." It was this that inspired the creation of the world and men. The human manifestation of it was the culmination of the world's history. The world is meaningless without it. It is the keystone of the world's arch. By it all things are held together. It was divine. It was God himself, for God is the love and light and life which have ever been with God. It was the eternal product of his Being; and we lapse into the poetic imagery of John as we attempt to describe it.

This ideal was embodied in a man, and dwelt in the flesh as in a tent. This embodiment was no result of human effort, reaching after and grasping what had before been unattained. It had its beginning in God. It was he, revealing himself in and thru the man whom he had predestined, endowed and vindicated. What prophets had dimly seen, what nature and history had more dimly foreshadowed, what poets had sung, what never took a perfect form elsewhere, shone thru the veil of human flesh. The thought had found adequate expression, and had become the Word; and men saw and handled the Word of Life.

What word represents the eternal ideal that found expression in the life of Jesus? Love. What sounds to the heart when the cross has

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done its worst? Love. What is heard when once again, in glory, he appears to Saul of Tarsus, and proclaims that clouds and sunshine hide not men from his sight? It is love. Has not Jehovah vindicated the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the "express image" of his very being? The Book says this is real. Is it not so? Then, do we not interpret it aright when we say: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son"? If the presence of a prophet of God should warrant the statement that, in him, "God hath visited his people," can we possibly be wrong, when, in the presence of Jesus, we say "My Lord," and, realizing in him the presence of the Deity, as the source of his existence, power and goodness, add also the words "My God"? It is a feeble grasp of evolution that denies it. Let theologians explain the manifestation in Jesus of that ideal as they will, let men explain as they please the origin of our sense of moral obligation to reach it, the ideal is there; and the silent voice that impels us to obey it is the voice of a divine reality, speaking to the inner ear of the heart: "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

(d) Take the one deliverance from sin and

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death thru faith in the personal sacrifice of Jesus, the Christ. We feel that any coming short of the divine ideal embodied in Jesus, in conduct, or feeling, or general character, is sin, a thing to be avoided, to be ashamed of, to be abandoned. Whence comes the power to avoid it? What delivers from the crushing sense of shame? What so changes our weakness into power that we can and do abandon sin? From millions of hearts the answer comes: "It is because we believe that Christ's message of a Father's universal love, given in the face of certain and cruel death, has brought to us reconciliation, at-one-ment, with the loving and forgiving One." Can that voice that comforts and transforms, and lifts us above the syren call of temptation, and masters by its inspiring hope all other voices in the attractive world, be other than the voice of reality? His heart is surely dull that does not respond: "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

This subject should be of interest to the Jews. The Jew believes in God. He believes in the Spirit of God. Let him open his eyes and see that the God that wrought in Jesus is the God of his fathers. Let him bend his ear, not to hear the voices of councils and theologians, but the divine message of love and peace

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thru him who brought into realization the visions of the prophets. Let him ask the question, if he chooses: "Art thou the Messiah, the Son of the living God?" But let him also hear the voice that answers: "I that speak unto thee am he." Then shall he recognize the truth of the Three Sacred Existences, Father, Spirit and Son, the real Trinity, tho not the patristic, scholastic, or theological system of speculations, definitions and theories called the Trinity. He shall realize that we need some term by which to designate the group of three that plays such a part in our religious life; tho, in apostolic times, no such term was used. He may choose the simple term introduced by Theophilus, and call them The Triad. Or he may prefer the term introduced by Tertullian, and call them the Trinity, a name hallowed by the usage of many centuries. But he will feel that, by whatever name the sacred three may be known, no violence shall even seem to be done to the unity of God, the thought so precious to him and so vital to the world.

Then shall he, and no small Christian sect, go forth to win the world for God; and the grafting of him in again to the vine of God's own planting will be the coming to the great world of "life from the dead." Unity and

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blessing await the coming of the Jew to his own Messiah.

Then, in the fulfilment of the prophecies of both the Old Testament and the New, the world will have the grandest proof ever given that God's Spirit did inspire the prophets; infidelity will cease; Mohammedans will exchange the name of Mahomet for that of Jesus, while they continue to adore him whom, in their Koran they call "the King, the Holy, the Mighty, the Wise"; the Kingdom of God and of Christ will be established; and doubts as to the final outcome for faithful souls will end.

CONCLUSION.

The importance of this subject here treated may be seen from its bearing on Christianity at large.

1. Apostolic Christianity was based upon the Jewish Scriptures and the facts of Christ's life. Taking theology to mean a scientific system of definitions, philosophical explanations and co-ordination of real and supposed facts in reference to God, man and the relations between them, the earliest form of Christianity was not theological. This may be asserted of the mass of Christian people and Christian thought, notwithstanding the beginnings of such a system in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

2. Modern Christianity, on the contrary, in its various divisions, is identified with theology. Clerical education is theological. The education of the people thru the pulpit is theological. If the pulpit does not sound a note in harmony with the popular theological system, woe be to the preacher! From an underlying theology all

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ecclesiastical systems take their form. The Christian or non-Christian standing of men depends upon their acceptance or non-acceptance of given systems of theology. Missions to foreign lands transplant to them the theologies of the home country. In some cases, spiritual, moral and eternal life are openly declared to be inseparable from acceptance of a given theology.

3. These forms of theology are founded upon Church authority. To each denomination, the term "Church" means the adherents and leaders of that denomination, whether it be Greek, Roman, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, or what not. By "denomination" is here meant any organized group of Christian men, with a special name designating that group. Each has its peculiar theology, and each supports its theology by an appeal to the authorities of the denomination. When no sectarian divisions existed, the supposed authority of the whole Church was final, in all questions of dogmatic correctness. When efforts are now made to unite separate denominations, a common theological statement presents one of the preliminary difficulties. The force of any such statement rests on the authority of those who adopt it.

Theoretically, Protestant denominations rec-

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ognize the right of private judgment, and men are free to examine the Scriptures; but, practically, all research by the adherents and clergy of these denominations must come to the same conclusions as those of the authorities who formed, or who administer the creeds, confessions, articles, disciplines, or other forms which these authorities set up, under the penalty of censure, if not of excommunication.

4. If relief is to be found from the confusion of different authorities, and from the stagnation due to the rigidity and perpetuity of authoritative dogmatic statements, it can be obtained only by a return to the free, candid and untrammelled examination of the Scriptures, apart from the judgment of "Fathers" and theologians of any section of the Church whatever.

5. The importance of this subject finds its centre in the relation of "the man Christ Jesus" to God. Reduce the Savior to a mere man and nothing can save Christianity from sinking into a mere passing phase of human religiousness. It is the divine element in Jesus that makes him attractive, and gives the power that controls both the intelligence and the affections: we cannot lean on a mere arm of flesh. It is only the infinite that can elevate mankind beyond the highest point of self-culture. It is

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only the divine that can make Christ's religion permanent.

In what sense is that divine element in him? What do the Scriptures say? How does Christ himself express it? It is always that the Father is in him. He leads us to the thought that this world has never been automatic, that there is a living power which has moulded the ages, and that this power found its highest form of self-expression in himself. It is this which makes the whole narrative of his life, as given in the gospels, consistent.

Grant that his life was not the spontaneous rise of a gifted peasant, but a divinely pre-destined and guided instrument for the deliverance of mankind from sin and despair, and all the recorded events fall into a line of consistent and reasonable connection. Whatever may be said of the correctness and appropriateness of the prophetic announcement of an extraordinary birth, such a birth seems just what is needed in the case of so special a messenger of God, to account for the extraordinary powers displayed in his dealings with men. Accept the records of these powers, and they can be accounted for only by the supposition of a divine origin; and the records should never be rejected simply because they savor of a supernatural action in him, whose life they present.

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Assume this divine presence in and with him, and the early consciousness in his childhood of a divine mission becomes clear, his continued consciousness of divine communication becomes quite natural, miraculous power ceases to be astonishing, and all the wonders of his later history are just what might be expected in one so anointed for his special work. The mystery of this connection of the divine with the human remains as deep as ever; but it does not lead to speculations that confound all sense of possibility, and deny the prophetic assurances on which Christianity is built.

6. What has been here written is an attempt to present some principles which may guide men in determining what is the true sense of the documents we call "The Bible." If it does not in all things support the prevailing theology, it may show that Scripture is capable of a meaning that is both reasonable and worthy of trust.

THE END











